AN ENEMY TO THE KING

BY R·N·STEPHENS·

Charles A. Hunt

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"WITH A LOUD OATH HE REINED BACK HIS HORSE"

AN ENEMY TO THE KING

From the recently discovered memoirs of the Sieur de la Tournoire

By

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CHAPTER I.

TWO ENCOUNTERS BY NIGHT.

HITHERTO I have written with the sword, after the fashion of greater men, and requiring no secretary. I now take up the quill to set forth, correctly, certain incidents which, having been noised about, stand in danger of being inaccurately reported by some imitator of Brantome and De l'Estoile. If all the world is to know of this matter, let it know thereof rightly.

It was early in January, in the year 1578, that I first set out for Paris. My mother had died when I was twelve years old, and my father had followed her a year later. It was his last wish that I, his only child, should remain at the château, in Anjou, continuing my studies until the end of my twenty-first year. He had chosen that I should learn man-

ners as best I could at home, not as page in some great household or as gentleman in the retinue of some high personage. "A De Launay shall have no master but God and the King," he said. Reverently I had fulfilled his injunctions, holding my young impulses in leash. I passed the time in sword practice with our old steward, Michel, who had followed my father in the wars under Coligny, in hunting in our little patch of woods, reading the Latin authors in the flowery garden of the château, or in my favorite chamber, — that one at the top of the new tower which had been built in the reign of Henri II. to replace the original black tower from which the earliest De Launay of note got the title of Sieur de la Tournoire. All this while I was holding in curb my impatient desires. So almost resistless are the forces that impel the young heart, that there must have been a hard struggle within me had I had to wait even a month longer for the birthday which finally set me free to go what ways I chose. I rose early on that cold but sunlit January day, mad with eagerness to be off and away into the great world that at last lay open to me. Poor old Michel was sad that I had decided to go alone. But the only servant whom I would have taken with me was the only one to whom I would entrust the house of my fathers in my absence, — old Michel himself. I thought the others too rustic. My few tenants

would have made awkward lackeys in peace, sorry soldiers in war.

Michel had my portmanteau fastened on my horse, which had been brought out into the courtyard, and then he stood by me while I took my last breakfast in La Tournoire; and, in my haste to be off, I would have eaten little had he not pressed much upon me, reminding me how many leagues I would have to ride before meeting a good inn on the Paris road. He was sad, poor old Michel, at my going, and yet he partook of some of my own eagerness. At last I had forced down my unwilling throat food enough to satisfy even old Michel's solicitude. He girded on me the finest of the swords that my father had left, placed over my violet velvet doublet the new cloak I had bought for the occasion, handed me my new hat with its showy plumes, and stood aside for me to pass out. In the pocket of my red breeches was a purse holding enough golden crowns to ease my path for some time to come. I cast one last look around the old hall and, trying to check the rapidity of my breath, and the rising of the lump in my throat, strode out to the court-yard, breathed the fresh air with a new ecstasy, mounted the steaming horse, gave Michel my hand for a moment, and, purposely avoiding meeting his eyes, spoke a last kind word to the old man. After acknowledging the farewells of the other servants, who stood in

line trying to look joyous, I started my horse with a little jerk of the rein, and was borne swiftly through the porte, over the bridge, and out into the world. Behind me was the home of my fathers and my childhood; before me was Paris. It was a fine, bracing winter morning, and I was twenty-one. A good horse was under me, a sword was at my side, there was money in my pocket. Will I ever feel again as I did that morning?

Some have stupidly wondered why, being a Huguenot born and bred, I did not, when free to leave La Tournoire, go at once to offer my sword to Henri of Navarre or to some other leader of our party. This is easily answered. If I was a Huguenot, I was also a man of twenty-one; and the latter much more than the former. Paris was the centre of the world. There was the court, there were the adventures to be had, there must one go to see the whole of life; there would I meet men and make conquests of women. There awaited me the pleasures of which I had known only by report, there the advancement, the triumphs in personal quarrels; and, above all else, the great love affair of my dreams. Who that is a man and twenty-one has not such dreams? And who that is a man and seventy would have been without them? Youth and folly go together, each sweetening the other. The greatest fool, I think, is he who would have gone through life entirely

without folly. What then mattered religion to me? Or what mattered the rivalry of parties, except as they might serve my own personal ambitions and desires? Youth was ebullient in me. The longing to penetrate the unknown made inaction intolerable to me. I must rush into the whirlpool; I must be in the very midst of things; I longed for gaiety, for mystery, for contest; I must sing, drink, fight, make love. It is true that there would have been some outlet for my energies in camp life, but no gratification for my finer tastes, no luxury, no such pleasures as Paris afforded, — little diversity, no elating sense of being at the core of events, no opportunities for love-making. In Paris were the pretty women. The last circumstance alone would have decided me.

I had reached twenty-one without having been deeply in love. I had, of course, had transient periods of inclination towards more than one of the demoiselles in the neighborhood of La Tournoire; but these demoiselles had rapidly become insipid to me. As I grew older, I found it less easy to be attracted by young ladies whom I had known from childhood up. I had none the less the desire to be in love; but the woman whom I should love must be new to me, a mystery, something to fathom and yet unfathomable. She must be a world, inexhaustible, always retaining the charm of the partly un-

known. I had high aspirations. No pretty maid, however low in station, was unworthy a kiss and some flattery; but the real *affaire d'amour* of my life must have no elements but magnificent ones. She must be some great lady of the court, and our passion must be attended by circumstances of mystery, danger, everything to complicate it and raise it to an epic height. Such was the amour I had determined to find in Paris. Remember, you who read this, that I am disclosing the inmost dreams of a man of twenty-one. Such dreams are appropriate to that age; it is only when they are associated with middle age that they become ridiculous; and when thoughts of amatory conquest are found in common with gray hairs, they are loathsome. If I seem to have given my mind largely up to fancies of love, consider that I was then at the age when such fancies rather adorn than deface. Indeed, a young man without thoughts of love is as much an anomaly as is an older man who gives himself up to them.

I looked back once at La Tournoire, when I reached the top of the hill that would, in another minute, shut it from my view. I saw old Michel standing at the porte. I waved my hand to him, and turned to proceed on my way. Soon the lump in my throat melted away, the moisture left my eyes, and only the future concerned me. Every object that

came into sight, every tree along the roadside, now interested me. I passed several travellers, some of whom seemed to envy me my indifference to the cold weather, my look of joyous content.

About noon I overtook, just where the road left a wood and turned to cross a bridge, a small cavalcade consisting of an erect, handsome gentleman of middle age, and several armed lackeys. The gentleman wore a black velvet doublet, and his attire, from his snowy ruff to his black boots, was in the best condition. He had a frank, manly countenance that invited address. At the turn of the road he saw me, and, taking me in at a glance, he fell behind his lackeys that I might come up to him. He greeted me courteously, and after he had spoken of the weather and the promise of the sky, he mentioned, incidentally, that he was going to Paris. I told him my own destination, and we came to talking of the court. I perceived, from his remarks, that he was well acquainted there. There was some talk of the quarrels between the King's favorites and those of his brother, the Duke of Anjou; of the latter's sulkiness over his treatment at the hands of the King; of the probabilities for and against Anjou's leaving Paris and putting himself at the head of the malcontent and Huguenot parties; of the friendship between Anjou and his sister Marguerite, who remained at the Court of France while her husband,

Henri of Navarre, held his mimic Huguenot court in Béarn. Presently, the name of the Duke of Guise came up.

Now we Huguenots held, and still hold, Henri de Guise to have been a chief instigator of the event of St. Bartholomew's Night, in 1572. Always I had in my mind the picture of Coligny, under whom my father had fought, lying dead in his own courtyard, in the Rue de Bethizy, his murder done under the direction of that same Henri, his body thrown from his window into the court at Henri's orders, and there spurned by Henri's foot. I had heard, too, of this illustrious duke's open continuance of his amour with Marguerite, queen of our leader, Henri of Navarre. When I spoke of him to the gentleman at whose side I rode, I put no restraint on my tongue.

"The Duke of Guise!" I said. "All that I ever wish to say of him can be very quickly spoken. If, as you Catholics believe, God has an earthly representative in the Pope, then I think the devil has one in Henri de Guise."

The gentleman was quiet for a moment, and looked very sober. Then he said gravely:

"All men have their faults, monsieur. The difference between men is that some have no virtues to compensate for their vices."

"If Henri de Guise has any virtues," I replied, "he wears a mask over them; and he conceals

them more effectually than he hides his predilection for assassination, his amours, and his design to rule France through the Holy League of which he is the real head."

The gentleman turned very red, and darted at me a glance of anger. Then restraining himself, he answered in a very low tone:

"Monsieur, the subject can be discussed by us in only one way, or not at all. You are young, and it would be too pitiful for you to be cut off before you have even seen Paris. Doubtless, you are impatient to arrive there. It would be well, then, if you rode on a little faster. It is my intention to proceed at a much slower pace than will be agreeable to you."

And he reined in his horse.

I reined in mine likewise. I was boiling with wrath at his superior tone, and his consideration for my youth, but I imitated his coolness as well as I could.

"Monsieur," said I, "whether or not I ever see Paris is not a matter to concern you. I cannot allow you to consider my youth. You wish to be obliging; then consider that nothing in the world would be a greater favor to me than an opportunity to maintain with my sword my opinion of Henri de Guise."

The man smiled gently, and replied without passion:

"Then, as we certainly are not going to fight, let my refusal be, not on account of your youth, but on account of my necessity of reaching Paris without accident."

His horse stood still. His lackeys also had stopped their horses, which stood pawing and snorting at a respectful distance. It was an awkward moment for me. I could not stand there trying to persuade a perfectly serene man to fight. So with an abrupt pull of the rein I started my horse, mechanically applied the spur, and galloped off. A few minutes later I was out of sight of this singularly self-controlled gentleman, who resented my description of the Duke of Guise. I was annoyed for some time to think that he had had the better of the occurrence; and I gave myself up for an hour to the unprofitable occupation of mentally reënacting the scene in a manner more creditable to myself.

"I may meet him in Paris some day," I said to myself, "and find an occasion to right myself in his estimation. He shall not let my youth intercede for me again."

Then I wished that I had learned his name, that I might, on reaching Paris, have found out more about him. Having in his suite no gentlemen, but several lackeys, he was, doubtless, not himself an important personage, but a follower of one. Not wishing to

meet him again until circumstances should have changed, I passed the next inn to which I came, guessing that he would stop there. He must have done so, for he did not come up with me that day, or at any time during my journey.

It was at sunset on a clear, cold evening that, without further adventure, I rode into Paris through the Porte St. Michel, and stared, as I proceeded along the Rue de la Harpe, at the crowds of people hurrying in either direction in each of the narrow, crooked streets, each person so absorbed in his own errand, and so used to the throng and the noise, that he paid no heed to the animation that so interested and stirred me. The rays of the setting sun lighted up the towers of the colleges and abbeys at my right, while those at my left stood black against the purple and yellow sky. I rode on and on, not wishing to stop at an inn until I should have seen more of the panorama that so charmed me. At last I reached the left bank of the Seine, and saw before me the little Isle of the City, the sunlit towers of Notre Dame rising above the wilderness of turrets and spires surrounding them. I crossed the Pont St. Michel, stopping for a moment to look westward towards the Tour de Nesle, and then eastward to the Tournelle, thus covering, in two glances, the river bank of the University through which I had just come. Emerging from the bridge, I followed the Rue de la

Barillerie across the Isle of the City, finding everywhere the same bustle, the same coming and going of citizens, priests, students, and beggars, all alert, yet not to be surprised by any spectacle that might arise before them. Reaching the right arm of the Seine, I stopped again, this time on the Pont-au-Change, and embraced, in a sweeping look from left to right, the river bank of the town, the Paris of the court and the palaces, of the markets and of trade, the Paris in which I hoped to find a splendid future, the Paris into which, after taking this comprehensive view from the towers of the Louvre and the Tour de Bois away leftward, to the Tour de Billy away rightward, I urged my horse with a jubilant heart. It was a quite dark Paris by the time I plunged into it. The Rue St. Denis, along which I rode, was beginning to be lighted here and there by stray rays from windows. The still narrower streets, that ran, like crooked corridors in a great château, from the large thoroughfare, seemed to be altogether dark.

But, dark as the city had become, I had determined to explore some of it that night, so charming was its novelty, so inviting to me were its countless streets, leading to who knows what? I stopped at a large inn in the Rue St. Denis, saw my tired horse well cared for by an hostler, who seemed amazed at my rustic solicitude for details, had my portmanteau

deposited in a clean, white-washed chamber, overlooking the street, ate a supper such as only a Paris innkeeper can serve and a ravenous youth from the country can devour, and went forth afoot, after curfew, into the now entirely dark and no longer crowded street, to find what might befall me.

It had grown colder at nightfall, and I had to draw my cloak closely around me. A wind had come up, too, and the few people whom I met were walking with head thrust forward, the better to resist the breeze when it should oppose them. Some were attended by armed servants bearing lanterns. The sign-boards, that hung from the projecting stories of the tall houses, swung as the wind swayed, and there was a continual sound of creaking. Clouds had risen, and the moon was obscured much of the time, so that when I looked down some of the narrower streets I could not see whether they ended within a short distance, turned out of sight, or continued far in the same direction. Being accustomed to the country roads, the squares of smaller towns, and the wide avenues of the little park at La Tournoire, I was at first surprised at the narrowness of the streets. Across one of them lay a drunken man, peacefully snoring. His head touched the house on one side of the street, and his feet pressed the wall on the opposite side. It surprised me to find so many of the streets no

wider than this. But there was more breathing room wherever two streets crossed and where several of them opened into some great place. The crookedness and curvature of the streets constantly tempted me to seek what might be beyond, around the corner, or the bend; and whenever I sought, I found still other corners or bends hiding the unknown, and luring me to investigate.

I had started westward from the inn, intending to proceed towards the Louvre. But presently, having turned aside from one irregular street into another, I did not know what was the direction in which I went. The only noises that I heard were those caused by the wind, excepting when now and then came suddenly a burst of loud talk, mingled mirth and jangling, as quickly shut off, when the door of some cabaret opened and closed. When I heard footsteps on the uneven pebble pavement of the street, and saw approaching me out of the gloom some cloaked pedestrian, I mechanically gripped the handle of my sword, and kept a wary eye on the stranger, — knowing that in passing each other we must almost touch elbows. His own suspicious and cautious demeanor and motions reflected mine.

At night, in the narrow streets of a great town, there exists in every footfall heard, every human figure seen emerging from the darkness, the possi-

bility of an encounter, an adventure, something unexpected. So, to the night roamer, every human sound or sight has an unwonted interest.

As I followed the turning of one of the narrowest streets, the darkness, some distance ahead of me, was suddenly cleft by a stream of light from a window that was quickly opened in the second story of a tall house on the right-hand side of the way. Then the window was darkened by the form of a man coming from the chamber within. At his appearance into view I stood still. Resting for a moment on his knees on the window-ledge, he lowered first one leg, then the other, then his body, and presently he was hanging by his hands over the street. Then the face of a woman appeared in the window, and as the man remained there, suspended, he looked up at her inquiringly.

"It is well," she said, in a low tone; "but be quick. We are just in time." And she stood ready to close the window as soon as he should be out of the way.

"Good night, adorable," he replied, and dropped to the street. The lady immediately closed the window, not even waiting to see how the man had alighted.

Had she waited to see that, she would have seen him, in lurching over to prevent his sword from striking the ground, lose his balance on a de-

tached paving-stone, and fall heavily on his right arm.

"*Peste!*" he hissed, as he slowly scrambled to his feet. "I have broken my arm!"

With his right arm hanging stiff by his side, and clutching its elbow with his left hand, as if in great pain, he hastened away from the spot, not having noticed me. I followed him.

After a second turn, the street crossed another. In the middle of the open space at the junction, there stood a cross, as could be seen by the moonlight that now came through an interval in the procession of wind-driven clouds.

Just as the man with the hurt arm, who was slender, and had a dandified walk, entered this open space, a gust of wind came into it with him; and there came, also, from the other street, a robust gentleman of medium height, holding his head high and walking briskly. Caught by the gust of wind, my gentleman from the second story window ran precipitantly into the other. The robust man was not sent backward an inch. He took the shock of meeting with the firmness of an unyielding wall, so that the slender gentleman rebounded. Each man uttered a brief oath, and grasped his sword, the slender one forgetting the condition of his arm.

"Oh, it is you," said the robust man, in a virile voice, of which the tone was now purposely offen-

sive. "The wind blows fragile articles into one's face to-night."

"It blows gentlemen into muck-heaps," responded the other, quickly.

The hearty gentleman gave a loud laugh, meant to aggravate the other's anger, and then said:

"We do not need seconds, M. de Quelus," putting into his utterance of the other's name a world of insult.

"Come on, then, M. Bussy d'Amboise," replied the other, pronouncing the name only that he might, in return, hiss out the final syllable as if it were the word for something filthy.

Both whipped out their swords, M. de Quelus now seemingly unconscious of the pain in his arm.

I looked on from the shadow in which I had stopped, not having followed De Quelus into the little open space. My interest in the encounter was naturally the greater for having learned the names of the antagonists. At La Tournoire I had heard enough of the court to know that the Marquis de Quelus was the chief of the King's effeminate chamberlains, whom he called his minions, and that Bussy d'Amboise was the most redoubtable of the rufflers attached to the King's discontented brother, the Duke of Anjou; and that between the dainty gentlemen of the King and the bullying swordsmen of the Duke, there was continual feud.

Bussy d'Amboise, disdaining even to remove his cloak, of which he quickly gathered the end under his left arm, made two steps and a thrust at De Quelus. The latter made what parade he could for a moment, so that Bussy stepped back to try a feint. De Quelus, trying to raise his sword a trifle higher, uttered an ejaculation of pain, and then dropped the point. Bussy had already begun the motion of a lunge, which it was too late to arrest, even if he had discovered that the other's arm was injured and had disdained to profit by such an advantage. De Quelus would have been pierced through had not I leaped forward with drawn sword and, by a quick thrust, happened to strike Bussy's blade and make it diverge from its course.

De Quelus jumped back on his side, as Bussy did on his. Both regarded me with astonishment.

"Oh, ho, an ambush!" cried Bussy. "Then come on, all of you, messieurs of the daubed face and painted beard! I shall not even call my servants, who wait at the next corner."

And he made a lunge at me, which I diverted by a parry made on instinct, not having had time to bring my mind to the direction of matters. Bussy then stood back on guard.

"You lie," said De Quelus, vainly trying to find sufficient strength in his arm to lift his sword. "I was alone. My servants are as near as yours, yet I have

not called. As for this gentleman, I never saw him before."

"That is true," I said, keeping up my guard, while Bussy stood with his back to the cross, his brows knit in his effort to make out my features.

"Oh, very well," said Bussy. "I do not recognize him, but he is evidently a gentleman in search of a quarrel, and I am disposed to be accommodating."

He attacked me again, and I surprised myself, vastly, by being able to resist the onslaughts of this, the most formidable swordsman at the court of France. But I dared not hope for final victory. It did not even occur to me as possible that I might survive this fight. The best for which I hoped was that I might not be among the easiest victims of this famous sword.

"Monsieur," said De Quelus, while Bussy and I kept it up, with offence on his part, defence on mine, "I am sorry that I cannot intervene to save your life. My arm has been hurt in a fall, and I cannot even hold up my sword."

"I know that," I replied. "That is why I interfered."

"The devil!" cried Bussy. "Much as I detest you, M. de Quelus, you know I would not have attacked you had I known that. But this gentleman, at least, has nothing the matter with his arm."

And he came for me again.

Nothing the matter with my arm! Actually a compliment upon my sword-handling from the most invincible fighter, whether in formal duel or sudden quarrel, in France! I liked the generosity which impelled him to acknowledge me a worthy antagonist, as much as I resented his overbearing insolence; and I began to think there was a chance for me.

For the first time, I now assumed the offensive, and with such suddenness that Bussy fell back, out of sheer surprise. He had forgotten about the cross that stood in the centre of the place, and, in leaping backward, he struck this cross heavily with his sword wrist. His glove did not save him from being jarred and bruised; and, for a moment, he relaxed his firm grasp of his sword, and before he could renew his clutch I could have destroyed his guard and ended the matter; but I dropped my point instead.

Bussy looked at me in amazement, and then dropped his.

"Absurd, monsieur! You might very fairly have used your advantage. Now you have spoiled everything. We can't go on fighting, for I would not give you another such opening, nor would I kill a man who gives me my life."

"As you will, monsieur," said I. "I am glad not to be killed, for what is the use of having fought

Bussy d'Amboise if one may not live to boast of it?"

He seemed pleased in his self-esteem, and sheathed his sword. "I am destined not to fight to-night," he answered. "One adversary turns out to have a damaged arm, which would make it a disgrace to kill him, and the other puts me under obligation for my life But, M. de Quelus, your arm will recover."

"I hope so, if for only one reason," replied Quelus.

Bussy d'Amboise then bowed to me, and strode on his way. He was joined at the next crossing of streets by four lackeys, who had been waiting in shadow. All had swords and pistols, and one bore a lantern, which had been concealed beneath his cloak.

De Quelus, having looked after him with an angry frown, now turned to me, and spoke with affability:

"Monsieur, had you not observed the condition of my arm, I should have resented your aid. But as it is, I owe you my life no less than he owes you his, and it may be that I can do more than merely acknowledge the obligation."

I saw here the opportunity for which a man might wait months, and I was not such a fool as to lose it through pride.

"Monsieur," I said, "I am Ernanton de Launay,

Sieur de la Tournoire. I arrived in Paris to-day, from Anjou, with the desire of enlisting in the French Guards."

De Quelus smiled. "You desire very little for a gentleman, and one who can handle a sword so well."

"I know that, but I do not bring any letters, and I am not one who could expect the favor of a court appointment. I am a Huguenot."

"A Huguenot?" said De Quelus. "And yet you come to Paris?"

"I prefer to serve the King of France. He is at present on good terms with the Huguenots, is he not?"

"Yes, — at least, he is not at war with them. Well, gentlemen like you are not to be wasted, even though Huguenots. Attach yourself to Duret's company of the guards for the present, and who knows when you may win a vacant captaincy? I will bring you to the attention of the King. Can you be, to-morrow at eleven o'clock, at the principal gate of the Louvre?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very well. I will speak to Captain Duret, also, about you."

He looked at my active figure, neither tall nor short, neither broad nor too thin, observed the length of my arm, and remembered that I had made so

respectable a showing with the sword against Bussy. I could see that he was thinking, "It is well to have in one's debt as many such strong and honest young gentlemen as can be had. Even a Huguenot may be useful in these days."

Then, when so many leaders contended, every man was desirous of gaining partisans. At court, wise people were scrupulous to repay obligations, in the hope of securing future benefit. I divined De Quelus's motives, but was none the less willing to profit by them as to the possible vacant captaincy.

"Then I thank you, monsieur, and will keep the appointment," I said.

"You are alone," said De Quelus. "One does not know when one may have one's throat cut for a sou, after dark in the streets of Paris. Will you accept the escort of two of my servants? They are waiting for me in the next street. One does not, you know, let one's servants wait too near windows out of which one expects to drop," he added with a smile.

"I thank you, monsieur, but I have already fared so well alone to-night, that I should fear to change my fortune by taking attendants."

"Then good night, monsieur. No, thank you. I can sheathe my own sword. My arm has lost its numbness. *Parbleu*, I should like to meet Bussy d'Amboise now."

And he strode away, leaving me standing by the cross.

I hesitated between returning to the inn, and resuming my exploration of the streets. I decided to go back, lest I be shut out for the night.

I had made my way some distance, in the labyrinth of streets, when, on reaching another junction of ways, I heard steps at some distance to the left. Looking in that direction, I saw approaching a little procession headed by two men servants, one of whom carried a lantern. I stepped back into the street from which I had just emerged, that I might remain unseen, until it should pass. Peering around the street corner, I saw that behind the two servants came a lady, whose form indicated youth and elegance, and who leaned on the arm of a stout woman, doubtless a servant. Behind these two came another pair of lackeys.

The lady wore a mask, and although heavily cloaked, shivered in the January wind, and walked as rapidly as she could. The four men had swords and pistols, and were sturdy fellows, able to afford her good protection.

The two men in advance passed without seeing me, stepping easily over a pool of muddy water that had collected in a depression in the street, and had not yet had time to freeze.

When the lady reached this pool, she stopped at

its brink and looked down at it, with a little motion of consternation.

"I cannot step across this lake," she said, in a voice that was low-pitched, rich, and full of charm to the ear. "We must skirt its borders."

And she turned to walk a short distance up the street in which I stood.

"Not so, madame," I said, stepping forth and bowing. "The lake is a long one, and you would have to go far out of your way. I will convey you across in a moment, if you will allow me." And I held out my arms, indicating my willingness to lift her across the pool.

The two servants in the rear now hastened up, ready to attack me, and those ahead turned and came back, their hands on their weapons.

The lady looked at me through the eye-holes of her mask. Her lips and chin being visible, she could not conceal a quizzical smile that came at my offer.

"Why not?" she said, motioning her servants back.

I caught her up in my arms and lifted her over the puddle. She slid from my grasp with a slight laugh.

I sought some pretext to prolong this meeting. "When I came out to-night," I said, "I dared not hope for such happiness as this."

"Nor did the astrologer predict anything of the kind to me," she replied. From this I knew the cause of her being in the street so late, — a secret visit to some fortune-teller. Then she called to the stout woman, who was looking for a place to step over the pool. "Come, Isa, in the name of Heaven. You know that if the guard is changed —"

She stopped, but she had already betrayed herself. She meant the guard of the palace, doubtless; and that her secret entrance, so long after the closing of the gates, depended for its ease on the presence of some officer with whom she had an understanding. She must be one of the ladies attached to the royal household, and her nocturnal excursion, from the Louvre, was evidently clandestine.

Isa now joined her mistress, and the latter, with a mere, "I thank you, monsieur," turned and hastened on her way. Soon the footsteps of her attendants died out of hearing.

I had not even seen her face, save the white, curved chin and the delicate mouth. I had only beheld her lithe figure, felt its heaving as I carried her, had my cold cheek warmed for a moment by her breath, heard her provoking laugh and her voice, rich with vitality. Yet her charm had caught me and remained with me. I could not, nor did I try to throw it off. I was possessed by a craving to see her again, to know more of her. Already I

made this unknown the heroine of my prospective love affair. I could soon find her, after gaining the entrée of the court; and I could identify her by her voice as well as by her probable recognition of me. Heaving a deep sigh, I left the place of our meeting and found my way back to the inn. Thanks to the presence of some late drinkers, I got in without much pounding on the door; and in my little white-washed chamber I dreamt of soft eyes that glowed through the holes of a lady's mask.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE-MAKING AT SHORT ACQUAINTANCE.

THE next morning was bright, and not too cold. At eleven I approached the great gate of the Louvre, wearing the bold demeanor of a man determined not to be abashed, even by the presence of royalty. Yet within me there was some slight trepidation lest I should, on first setting foot within the precincts of a palace, betray my rustic bringing up.

Others were being admitted at the gate, and some were coming out, both the King's council and the reception having been over for some time. A page, who had been waiting just inside the court, came out as I approached, and asked me if I were M. de Launay. Astonished, that he should have so easily picked me out, I replied that I was. He then said that he had come to conduct me to Monsieur the Marquis de Quelus, and I followed him into the great courtyard of the Louvre.

Before me was the imposing façade of the palace. Around me was an animated scene of well-dressed gentlemen coming and going, meeting one another,

forming little groups for a moment's interchange of news or inquiries, and as quickly breaking up. There were soldiers on guard, officers on duty and off, courtiers in brilliant doublets, dazzling ruffs, rich hose; gentlemen with gay plumes, costly cloaks, jewelled sword-hilts. There were pages, strutting about with messages; lackeys, belonging only to the greatest nobles or royal favorites. Everybody, whether gentleman, soldier, household officer, priest, page, or valet, went with an air of great consequence, with head high in air, every step, expression, and attitude proclaiming a sense of vast superiority to the rest of the world. It was as if people attached to the court were an elevated race of beings; or as if the court were Olympus, and these were gods and the servitors of gods, who, very properly, regarded mortals with disdain. Each man, too, maintained not only this lofty air as befitting one of the court, but also an aspect of individual preciousness as towards his fellow divinities. There was, in many a face or bearing, an expressed resentment, in advance, of any affront that might be offered. The soldiers swaggered, the gentlemen showed self-esteem in every motion. Nevertheless, there was much good nature and courtesy in the salutations, fragments of conversation, and exchanges of gossip. Leaving the sunlit courtyard behind, the page showed me up a fine stairway, where some gentle-

men tarried in little parties, while others ascended or descended. We passed through large galleries, the same animation continuing everywhere. I had no time, as we passed, to examine the superb hangings and fanciful decorations of the galleries in detail. The clothes of the courtiers, the brilliant display of velvet, silk, furs, and the finest linen, of every known hue, made a continually changing, moving panorama of color.

We approached, at last, a group extraordinarily radiant in attire. It was composed of very young men, some of whom had hardly yet acquired the beard required by the universal fashion. Even at a distance I could see that their cheeks were painted, could note their affectation of feminine attitudes, could smell the perfumes with which they had deluged their bodies. These were some of the favorites of the King, and more of the imitators of the favorites. No wonder that Bussy d'Amboise and the sturdy gentlemen of the King's ungainly brother, Anjou, had a manly detestation for these bedaubed effeminates, and sought opportunities to extirpate them with the sword. Yet these dainty youths, one of whom was De Quelus, who now came forward to meet me, were not cowards.

The young Marquis wore a slashed doublet of brown velvet and gold. His silken hose were of a lighter tint of brown. His ruff was so enormous

that he had to keep the point of his beard thrust forward at an elevation.

"I shall present you when the King passes," he said to me. "I have already spoken a word to Captain Duret, to whom you will report to-morrow. He will make a veteran of you in a quarter of an hour. The King, by the way, knows of your family. He knows every family in France, for that matter. I spoke of you to him at his rising this morning. He said that your father was a Huguenot, and I told him that you also were Protestant. You know enough of things in France to be aware that your Protestantism stands a little in your way at court, just now; but things may change before there is a vacant captaincy in the Guards."

People who have thought it bad enough that I should have gone to Paris, instead of to the court of Henri of Navarre, have been astonished, beyond expression, at my having desired to serve in the King's infantry, which, in the event of another civil war, might be arrayed against the army of our faith. But it must be borne in mind that I had this desire at a time when none knew how the different armies might be placed towards one another in the civil war, which everybody admitted must, at some time or other, occur. I was one of the many who believed that the Duke of Guise, using the newly formed Holy League as his instrument, would aim for the

throne of France; that King Henri III. would be forced, in self-defence, to make an alliance with the Huguenot leaders; and that, therefore, I, in fulfilling my ambition to be of this King's own soldiers, with quarters in or near Paris in time of peace, would, at the outbreak of civil war, find myself in line with the armies of our faith, opposed to the common enemy, the great Catholic Guise faction. Of the various predictions as to the future of France, I chose this one, perhaps because it was the only one which permitted me to follow out my wishes without outraging my sense of duty.

Before I could answer De Quelus, a voice said, "The King!" At the end of the gallery, where two halberdiers and two ushers stood, a pair of curtains had quickly parted, and out came a slender young man all velvet, silk, gold, and jewels; with the legs and the walk of a woman; with face painted like a courtesan's; a very slight beard on his chin, and a weak growth of hair on his upper lip; with a look half brazen, half shamefaced; with eyes half wistful, half malicious; his pear-shaped face expressing some love of the beautiful, some wit, some cynicism, much personal vanity, vicious inclinations and practices, restlessness, the torture of secret self-reproach, a vague distress, a longing to escape somewhere and be at peace.

He wore ear-rings, a necklace, bracelets, and a

small jewelled velvet cap; but he was without his famous basket of little dogs. This was Henri III., and he was going to pray in one of the churches.

As he came down the gallery, he noticed De Quelus, from afar, and then glanced at me. When he was before us, De Quelus made obeisance and presented me. Before I could finish my bow, the King said:

"Ah, it was your sword that helped to preserve my chamberlain from the ambush laid for him?" (From which it appeared that De Quelus had given his own account of the previous night's occurrence.) "And you wish to enlist in my regiment of French Guards? My faith, I have done well in reëstablishing that corps, if such brave young gentlemen are induced to enter it. I'll wager you hope to earn a commission soon."

I could only reply: "Such a hope is beyond my deserts, sire."

It was indeed beyond them, for I had seen no military service; but it was not beyond them for any other reason.

"Nothing is beyond the deserts of one whose sword is always loyal," said the King, with intended significance, and passed on; his gentlemen falling in behind him. De Quelus gave me directions as to my reporting, on the morrow, to Captain Duret, and added, "Rely on me for any favor or privilege that

you may wish, and for access to the palace. You have only to send me word." He then joined the following of the King.

I seemed now at liberty to remain in the Louvre as long as I might choose, having once entered it. I thought I would look about, knowing that if at any time I should be about to trespass on forbidden ground, there would be guards to hinder me. I went first to a window overlooking the court. I had no sooner turned my eyes down upon the splendid and animated scene below, then I felt a touch on my elbow. Looking around, I saw a familiar face, — that of M. de Rilly, another Anjou gentleman, whom I had known before his coming to court. He was now one of the King's equerries.

He was a sprightly man of about thirty, with none of the effeminacy that marked so many of the officers of the King's household. Though not of my religion, he made me heartily welcome, and undertook, at once, to initiate me into the mysteries of the court. He was a loquacious, open-minded man, who did not fear to express his thoughts, even in the shadow of royalty itself.

Hearing some clatter in the direction whither the King had gone, I looked after him. A short, compact young gentleman, plainly, but richly dressed, slightly stooping, with a rather surly face, and an envious eye, was coming towards the King. He wore

riding-boots and a cloak, and behind him came a troop of young men similarly attired. The foremost of them was Bussy d'Amboise, expressing defiance in every line of his bold, square countenance.

"Ah," said De Rilly, "there is the Duke of Anjou, who has been riding in the faubourg."

I took a second look at the surly gentleman. At this moment he exchanged glances with his brother, the King. The look of each was eloquent. The King's said, "I hate you for being a disloyal brother and a fractious subject; for conspiring to take away part of my kingdom; and who knows but that you are secretly aiming at my throne and my life?" The younger brother's look conveyed this much: "I hate you for your suspicions of me; for your not obtaining for me in your court the respect due the son and brother of a king; for encouraging your favorites to ridicule me. If I am driven to rebel against you, it is your own fault."

The King received the Duke's perfunctory salutation indifferently, and passed on. Anjou and his men turned into a gallery leading to his own apartments.

"I see that everybody is following the King," I said.

"Yes, but not I," replied De Rilly. "I find it no more amusing to pray when the King does than at any other time. I came here, this morn-

ing, to catch a glimpse of one of the Queen's ladies, but her Majesty has a cold, and my lady is in attendance."

"Which of the Queens has a cold?"

"Queen Louise, the King's wife. It is true, one may well ask which, when there is mention of the Queen nowadays. The Queen of France is a small factor when compared with the King's mother, Queen Catherine, or even with his sister, the Queen of Navarre, whose name is on everyone's tongue, on account of her love affairs, and of her suspected plots."

"What plots?"

"Some think she plots with the Duke of Guise, who cannot wait to rule France until Catherine's sons are both dead, — but Catherine will make him wait. Others believe that she plots with her Huguenot husband, the King of Navarre, to join him; and that the King keeps her here virtually a prisoner, lest her departure might be taken as a concession to the Huguenots; and, lastly and chiefly, they aver that she plots with her brother Anjou, to help him to join the Huguenots and malcontents as their leader."

"This is very interesting, M. de Rilly; but, pardon me, is it safe to say these things openly at court? I am fresh from the country, and anxious not to blunder."

"It is safe for me, because I am nobody at all, and, moreover, I say whatever is in my thoughts, and am looked upon as a rattlebrain, and not taken seriously. But it would not be safe for some. There comes the Queen of Navarre now. She and her ladies have been walking in their garden."

A number of ladies were entering the gallery from a side stairway. Marguerite de Valois, who ought to have been with her husband, the King of Navarre, at his little court at Nerac, remained instead at the court of France, to be its greatest ornament. She was, alas, its greatest scandal, also. But I admired her none the less for that, as she stood there, erect among her women, full of color and grace. Vast possibilities of mischief seemed buried in the depths of the big and brilliant eyes which gave so much life to the small, round face.

While she stood still for one of her maids to detach from her ruff a dead leaf that had dropped there during her walk, Bussy d'Amboise returned from Anjou's apartment. He walked up to her with a conquering air, bowed, and said something that made her laugh. Then he looked around and saw me. He spoke to her again, in a low tone, and she cast her fine eyes in my direction. She directed her ladies to fall back out of hearing, and again conferred with Bussy. At the end of this he left her, and strode over to me.

"Monsieur," he said, "the Queen of Navarre would like to know your name. I do not remember to have heard it last night."

I told him my name, and he took me by the arm, led me to Marguerite, and presented me, somewhat to my confusion, so rapidly was the thing done.

"You are a newcomer at court?" she said.

"I arrived in Paris only yesterday."

"And have taken service with — whom?"

"In the French Guards."

"We shall doubtless hear more of your skill with the sword," said Marguerite.

"I knew not I had any," I replied, "until I found out that I could stand up for a minute against the sword I met last night. Now I am glad to know that I possess skill, that I may hold it ever at the service of your Majesty as well as of the King."

This speech seemed to be exactly what Marguerite had desired of me, for she smiled and said, "I shall not forget you, M. de la Tournoire," before she turned away.

Bussy followed her, and I returned to De Rilly.

"Why should they pay any attention to me?" I said to him.

"No newcomer is too insignificant to be sought as an ally where there are so many parties," he replied, indifferently. "Those two are with Anjou, who may have use for as many adherents as he can

get one of these days. They say he is always meditating rebellion with the Huguenots or the Politiques, or both, and I don't blame a prince who is so shabbily treated at court."

"But what could a mere guardsman do, without friends or influence? Besides, my military duties —"

"Will leave you plenty of time to get into other troubles, if you find them amusing. How do you intend to pass the rest of the day?"

"I have no plans. I should like to see more of the Louvre on my first visit; and, to tell the truth, I had hoped to find out more about a certain lady who belongs to the court."

"What do you know of her?"

"Only that she has a beautiful figure and a pretty mouth and chin. She wore a mask, but I should recognize her voice if I heard it again."

"I wish you better luck than I have had to-day."

Marguerite and her damsels had turned down a corridor leading to her apartments. Bussy d'Amboise was disappearing down the stairs. There came, from another direction, the lively chatter of women's voices, and there appeared, at the head of the stairs up which Marguerite had come, another group of ladies, all young and radiant but one. The exception was a stout, self-possessed looking woman of middle age, dressed rather sedately in dark satin.

She had regular features, calm black eyes, an unruffled expression, and an air of authority without arrogance.

"Queen Catherine and some of her Flying Squadron," said De Rilly, in answer to my look of inquiry. "She has been taking the air after the King's council. Her own council is a more serious matter, and lasts all the time."

"Queen Catherine?" I exclaimed, incredulously, half refusing to see, in that placid matron, the ceaseless plotter, the woman accused of poisoning and all manner of bloodshed, whom the name represented.

"Catherine de Medici," said De Rilly, evidently finding it a pleasure to instruct a newcomer as to the personages and mysteries of the court. "She who preserves the royal power in France at this moment."

"She does not look as I have imagined her," I said.

"One would not suppose," said De Rilly, "that behind that serene countenance goes on the mental activity necessary to keep the throne in possession of her favorite son, who spends fortunes on his minions, taxes his subjects to the utmost, and disgusts them with his eccentric piety and peculiar vices."

"Dare one say such things in the very palace of that King?"

"Why not say what every one knows? It is what people say in hidden places that is dangerous."

"I wonder what is passing in the Queen-mother's mind at this moment," I said, as Catherine turned into the corridor leading to Anjou's apartments.

In the light of subsequent events, I can now give a better answer to that query than De Rilly, himself, could have given then. Catherine had to use her wits to check the deep designs of Henri, Duke of Guise, who was biding his time to claim the throne as the descendant of Charlemagne, and was as beloved of the populace as Henri III. was odious to it. Thanks to the rebellion of Huguenots and malcontents, Guise had been kept too busy in the field to prosecute his political designs. As head of the Catholic party, and heir to his father's great military reputation, he could not, consistently, avoid the duties assigned him by the crown. That these duties might not cease, Catherine found it to her interest that rebellion should continue indefinitely. The Huguenot party, in its turn, was kept by the Guise or Catholic party from assaults on the crown. In fine, while both great factions were occupied with each other, neither could threaten the King. This discord, on which she relied to keep her unpopular son safe on his throne, was fomented by her in secret ways. She shifted from side to side, as circumstances required. The parties must be main-

tained, in order that discontent might vent itself in factional contest, and not against the King. The King must belong to neither party, in order not to be of the party that might be ultimately defeated; yet he must belong to both parties, in order to be of the party that might ultimately triumph. To the maintainance of this impossible situation was the genius of Catherine de Medici successfully devoted for many years of universal discontent and bloodshed.

Now the Duke of Guise had found a way to turn these circumstances to account. Since the King of France could not hold down the Huguenots, the Holy Catholic League, composed of Catholics of every class throughout the most of France, would undertake the task. He foresaw that he, as leader of the League, would earn from the Catholics a gratitude that would make him the most powerful man in the kingdom. Catherine, too, saw this. To neutralize this move, she caused the King to endorse the League and appoint himself its head. The Huguenots must not take this as a step against them; on the contrary, they must be led to regard it as a shrewd measure to restrain the League. The King's first official edicts, after assuming the leadership of the League, seemed to warrant this view. So the King, in a final struggle against the Guise elements, might still rely on the aid of the Huguenots.

But the King still remained outside of the League, although nominally its chief. Catherine saw that it was not to be deluded from its real purpose. The only thing to do was to conciliate the Duke of Guise into waiting. There was little likelihood of either of her sons attaining middle age. The Duke of Guise, a splendid specimen of physical manhood, would doubtless outlive them; he might be induced to wait for their deaths. The rightful successor to the throne would then be Henri of Navarre, head of the Bourbon family. But he was a Huguenot; therefore Catherine affected to the Duke of Guise a great desire that he should succeed her sons. The existing peace allowed the Duke of Guise the leisure in which to be dangerous; so every means to keep him quiet was taken.

Some of these things De Rilly told me, as we stood in the embrasure of a window in the gallery, while Catherine visited her son, Anjou, — whose discontent at court complicated the situation, for he might, at any time, leave Paris and lead the Huguenots and malcontents in a rebellion which would further discredit her family with the people, demonstrate anew the King's incompetence, and give the League an opportunity.

"And does the Duke of Guise allow himself to be cajoled?" I asked De Rilly.

"Who knows? He is a cautious man, anxious

to make no false step. They say he would be willing to wait for the death of the King, but that he is ever being urged to immediate action by De Noyard."

"De Noyard?"

"One of Guise's followers; an obscure gentleman of very great virtue, who has recently become Guise's most valued counsellor. He keeps Guise on his guard against Catherine's wiles, they say, and discourages Guise's amour with her daughter, Marguerite, which Catherine has an interest in maintaining. Nobody is more *de trop* to Catherine just at present, I hear, than this same Philippe de Noyard. Ah! there he is now, — in the courtyard, the tallest of the gentlemen who have just dismounted, and are coming in this direction, with the Duke of Guise."

I looked out of the window, and at once recognized the Duke of Guise by the great height of his slender but strong figure, the splendid bearing, the fine oval face, with its small mustache, slight fringe of beard, and its scar, and the truly manly and magnificent manner, of which report had told us. He wore a doublet of cloth of silver, a black cloak of velvet, and a black hat with the Lorraine cross on its front. The tallest man in his following — Philippe de Noyard, of whom De Rilly had just been speaking — was the gentleman whom I had met on the road

to Paris, and who had refused to fight me after resenting my opinion of the Duke of Guise.

He must have arrived in Paris close behind me.

I was watching Guise and his gentlemen as they crossed the court to enter the palace, when suddenly I heard behind me the voice that had lingered in my ears all the previous night. I turned hastily around, and saw a group of Catherine's ladies, who stood around a fireplace, not having followed the Queen-mother to Anjou's apartments.

"Who is the lady leaning against the tapestry?" I quickly asked De Rilly.

"The one with the indolent attitude, and the mocking smile?"

"Yes, the very beautiful one, with the big gray eyes. By heaven, her eyes rival those of Marguerite, herself!"

"That is Mlle. d'Arency, a new recruit to Catherine's Flying Squadron."

Her face more than carried out the promise given by her chin and mouth. It expressed to the eye all that the voice expressed to the ear.

She had not seen me yet. I had almost made up my mind to go boldly over to her, when the Duke of Guise and his gentlemen entered the gallery. At the same instant, Catherine reappeared on the arm of the Duke of Anjou. The latter resigned her to the Duke of Guise, and went back to his apartment,

whereupon Catherine and Guise started for the further end of the gallery, as if for private conversation. His manner was courteous, but cold; hers calm and amiable.

"Ah, see!" whispered De Rilly to me. "What did I tell you?"

Catherine had cast a glance towards Guise's gentlemen. De Noyard, grave and reserved, stood a little apart from the others. For an instant, a look of profound displeasure, a deeply sinister look, interrupted the composure of Catherine's features.

"You see that M. de Noyard does not have the effect on the Queen-mother that a rose in her path would have," remarked De Rilly.

He did not notice what followed. But I observed it, although not till long afterward did I see its significance. It was a mere exchange of glances, and little did I read in it the secret which was destined to have so vast an effect on my own life, to give my whole career its course. It was no more than this: Catherine turned her glance, quickly, from De Noyard to Mlle. d'Arency, who had already been observing her. Mlle. d'Arency gave, in reply, an almost imperceptible smile of understanding; then Catherine and Guise passed on.

Two looks, enduring not a moment; yet, had I known what was behind them, my life would assuredly have run an entirely different course.

The gentlemen of the Duke of Guise now joined Catherine's ladies at the fireplace. For a time, Mlle. d'Arency was thus lost to my sight; then the group opened, and I saw her resting her great eyes, smilingly, on the face of De Noyard, who was talking to her in a low tone, his gaze fixed upon her with an expression of wistful adoration.

"The devil!" I muttered. "That man loves her."

"My faith!" said De Rilly, "one would think he was treading on your toes in doing so; yet you do not even know her."

"She is the woman I have chosen to be in love with, nevertheless," I said.

It seemed as if the Duke of Guise had come to the Louvre solely for a word with the Queen-mother, for now he took his departure, followed by his suite, while Catherine went to her own apartments. As De Noyard passed out, he saw me. His face showed that he recognized me, and that he wondered what I was doing in the palace. There was nothing of offence in his look, only a slight curiosity.

De Rilly now expressed an intention of going out to take the air, but I preferred to stay where I was; for Mlle. d'Arency had remained in the gallery, with some other of Catherine's ladies. So the loquacious equerry went without me.

I formed a bold resolution. Quelling the trepida-

tion that came with it, I strode quickly over to Mlle. d'Arency, who still stood against the tapestry as if she had been a figure in it but had come to life and stepped out into the apartment.

Her large eyes fell on me, and opened slightly wider, showing at once recognition and a not unpleasant surprise. I bowed very low, partly to conceal the flush that I felt mounting to my face.

"Pardon me, Mlle. d'Arency," I said, in a voice as steady as I could make it. Then I looked at her and saw her features assuming an expression of such coldness and astonishment that for some time neither my tongue nor my mind could continue the speech, nor could I move a step in retreat. All the while she kept her eyes upon me.

I drew a deep breath at last, and said in desperation:

"Doubtless I ought not to address you, being unknown to you, but if you will permit me, I will go and bring M. de Rilly, who will present me."

Her face softened somewhat, and she looked amused. "You seem quite able to present yourself," she said.

I was immensely relieved at this melting of the ice, just when I was beginning to feel that I was becoming a spectacle.

"I am Ernanton de Launay, Sieur de la Tournoire," I said, and to fill up the embarrassing pause

that followed, I added, "and, being a Huguenot, I am a nobody in Paris, — in fact, a mere volunteer in the French Guards."

"Well, Monsieur Guardsman, what do you wish to say to me?"

She was now in quite a pleasant, quizzical mood.

"I trust you do not expect me to say it in one word," I answered; and then I lowered my voice, "or in a single interview."

"It does not matter how many interviews it requires, if it is interesting," she answered nonchalantly.

"Alas!" I said. "I fear it is a story which many others have told you."

"An old story may seem new, when it comes from new lips."

"And when it is new to the lips that tell it, as mine is. Actually, I have never before made a confession of love."

"Am I to understand that you are about to make one now?"

"Have I not already made it?" I said.

We now stood quite apart from all others in the gallery, unnoticed by them; and our voices had fallen almost to a whisper.

She smiled, as if refusing to take my words seriously.

"If you have waited so long before making any

confession of love whatever," she said, "you have certainly made up for the delay by the speed which you use in making your first."

"On the contrary, I have had my confession ready for a long time, as my love has existed for a long time. I waited only to meet its object, — the woman of whom I had formed the ideal in my mind."

She looked as if about to burst into a laugh; but she changed her mind, and regarded me with a look of inquiry, as if she would read my heart. The smile was still on her lips, yet she spoke gravely when she said:

"Monsieur, I cannot make you out. If you are as sincere as you are original, — but I must go to the Queen-mother now. To-morrow afternoon, I shall walk in the gardens of the Tuileries, if the weather is clear."

"But one moment, I beg! M. de Noyard, — he is in love with you, is he not?"

Her face again took on its mocking look. "I have not asked him," she said lightly. Then she regarded me with a new and peculiar expression, as if some daring idea had come into her mind, some project which had to be meditated upon before it might be safely breathed.

"You look at me strangely, mademoiselle."

"Oh, I merely wonder at your curiosity in regard to M. de Noyard."

"My curiosity is not in regard to his feelings, but in regard to yours."

"Monsieur," she said, with a very captivating air of reproach, "have I not told you that I shall walk in the gardens of the Tuileries to-morrow afternoon?"

And she glided away, leaving behind her the most delighted and conceited young man, at that moment, in France.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE REQUEST OF MLLE. D'ARENCY.

I WAS disappointed in the interview that I had with Mlle. d'Arency in the gardens of the Tuileries, the next day. I saw her for only a few minutes, and then within sight of other of Catherine's ladies. Although I lost nothing of the ground I had taken, neither did I gain anything further. Afterward, at court receptions and *fêtes*, and, sometimes, in the palace galleries, when she was off duty, I contrived to meet her. She neither gave me opportunities nor avoided me. All the progress that I made was in the measure of my infatuation for her. When I begged for a meeting at which we might not be surrounded by half the court, she smiled, and found some reason to prevent any such interview in the near future. So, if I had carried things very far at our first meeting in the Louvre, I now paid for my exceptional fortune by my inability to carry them a step further.

Thus matters went for several days, during which the assertion of De Rilly was proven true, — that my duties as a member of the French Guards would leave

me some time for pleasure. Thanks to De Quelus, and to his enemy, Bussy d'Amboise, I made acquaintances both in the King's following and in that of the King's brother, the Duke of Anjou. De Rilly made me known to many who belonged to neither camp, and were none the worse for that. Our company lodged in the Faubourg St. Honore, but I led the life of a gentleman of pleasure, when off duty, and, as such, I had a private lodging within the town, near the Louvre, more pretentious than the whitewashed chamber in the Rue St. Denis. I drank often in cabarets, became something of a swaggerer, and something of a fop, — though never descending to the womanishness of the King's minions, — and did not allow my great love affair, which I never mentioned save in terms of mystery, to hinder me from the enjoyment of lesser amours of transient duration.

At this time everybody was talking of the feud between the King's favorites and the followers of the Duke of Anjou. The King's minions openly ridiculed Anjou for his ungainliness, which was all the greater for his look of settled discontent and resentment. His faithful and pugnacious Bussy retaliated by having his pages dress like the King's minions, — with doublets of cloth of gold, stiff ruffs, and great plumes, — and so attend him at the Twelfth Day *fêtes*. The minions, in their turn, sought revenge on Bussy by attacking him, on the following night,

while he was returning from the Louvre to his lodgings. He eluded them, and the next morning he accused M. de Grammont of having led the ambuscade. De Quelus then proposed that all the King's gentlemen should meet all those of the Duke in a grand encounter to the death. The Duke's followers gladly accepted the challenge. Three hundred men on each side would have fought, had not the King resolutely forbidden the duel. De Quelus, that night, led a number of gentlemen in an attack on Bussy's lodgings. Bussy and his followers made a stout resistance, the tumult becoming so great that the Marèchal de Montmorency called out the Scotch Guard to clear the street in front of Bussy's house; and it was time. Several gentlemen and servants were lying in their blood; and some of these died of their wounds.

It was openly known, about the court, that the Duke of Anjou held the King to be privy to these attacks on Bussy, and was frightfully enraged thereby; and that the King, in constant fear of the Duke's departure to join the Huguenots, — which event would show the King's inability to prevent sedition even in the royal family, and would give the Guise party another pretext to complain of his incompetence, — would forcibly obstruct the Duke's going.

It was this state of affairs that made Catherine de

Medici again take up her abode in the Louvre, that she might be on the ground in the event of a family outbreak, which was little less probable to occur at night than in the daytime. She had lately lived part of the time in her new palace of the Tuileries, and part of the time in her Hôtel des Filles Repenties, holding her council in either of these places, and going to the Louvre daily for the signature of the King to the documents of her own fabrication. At this time, Mlle. d'Arency was one of the ladies of the Queen-mother's bedchamber, and so slept in the Louvre. What should I be but such a fool as, when off duty, to pass certain hours of the night in gazing up at the window of my lady's chamber, as if I were a lover in an Italian novel! Again I must beg you to remember that I was only twenty-one, and full of the most fantastic ideas. I had undertaken an epic love affair, and I would omit none of the picturesque details that example warranted.

Going, one evening in February, to take up my post opposite the Louvre, I suddenly encountered a gentleman attended by two valets with torches. I recognized him as De Noyard, who had twice or thrice seen me about the palaces, but had never spoken to me. I was therefore surprised when, on this occasion, he stopped and said to me, in a low and polite tone:

"Monsieur, I have seen you, once or twice, talking

with M. Bussy d'Amboise, and I believe that, if you are not one of his intimates, you, at least, wish him no harm."

"You are right, monsieur," I said, quite mystified.

"I am no friend of his," continued M. de Noyard, in his cold, dispassionate tone, "but he is a brave man, who fights openly, and, so far, he is to be commended. I believe he will soon return from the Tuileries, where he has been exercising one of the horses of the Duke of Anjou. I have just come from there myself. On the way, I espied, without seeming to see them, a number of the gentlemen of the King waiting behind the pillars of the house with a colonnade, near the Porte St. Honore."

"One can guess what that means."

"So I thought. As for me, I have more important matters in view than interfering with the quarrels of young hot-heads; but I think that there is yet time for Bussy d'Amboise to be warned, before he starts to return from the Tuileries."

"M. de Noyard, I thank you," I said, with a bow of genuine respect, and in a moment I was hastening along the Rue St. Honore.

I understood, of course, the real reasons why De Noyard himself had not gone back to warn Bussy. Firstly, those in ambush would probably have noticed his turning back, suspected his purpose, and taken means to defeat it. Secondly, he

was a man from whom Bussy would have accepted neither warning nor assistance; yet he was not pleased that any brave man should be taken by surprise, and he gave me credit for a similar feeling. I could not but like him, despite my hidden suspicion that there was something between Mlle. d'Arency and him.

I approached the house with the colonnade, feigning carelessness, as if I were returning to my military quarters in the faubourg. The Porte St. Honore was still open, although the time set for its closing was past.

Suddenly a mounted figure appeared in the gateway, which, notwithstanding the dusk, I knew, by the way the rider sat his horse, to be that of Bussy. I was too late to warn him; I could only give my aid.

Three figures rushed out from beneath the supported upper story of the house, and made for Bussy with drawn swords. With a loud oath he reined back his horse on its haunches, and drew his own weapon, with which he swept aside the two points presented at him from the left. One of the three assailants had planted himself in front of the horse, to catch its bridle, but saw himself now threatened by Bussy's sword, which moved with the swiftness of lightning. This man thereupon fell back, but stood ready to obstruct the forward movement of the horse,

while one of the other two ran around to Bussy's right, so that the rider might be attacked, simultaneously on both sides.

This much I had time to see before drawing my sword and running up to attack the man on the horseman's left, whom I suddenly recognized as De Quelus. At the same instant I had a vague impression of a fourth swordsman rushing out from the colonnade, and, before I could attain my object, I felt a heavy blow at the base of my skull, which seemed almost to separate my head from my neck, and I fell forward, into darkness and oblivion.

I suppose that the man, running to intercept me, had found a thrust less practicable than a blow with the hilt of a dagger.

When I again knew that I was alive, I turned over and sat up. Several men — bourgeois, vagabonds, menials, and such — were standing around, looking down at me and talking of the affray. I looked for Bussy and De Quelus, but did not see either. At a little distance away was another group, and people walked from that group to mine, and *vice versa*.

"Where is M. Bussy?" I asked.

"Oho, this one is all right!" cried one, who might have been a clerk or a student; "he asks questions. You wish to know about Bussy, eh? You ought to have seen him gallop from the field without a

scratch, while his enemies pulled themselves together and took to their heels."

"What is that, over there?" I inquired, rising to my feet, and discovering that I was not badly hurt.

"A dead man who was as much alive as any of us before he ran to help M. Bussy. It is always the outside man who gets the worst of it, merely for trying to be useful. There come the soldiers of the watch, after the fight is over."

I walked over to the other group and knelt by the body on the ground. It was that of a gentleman whom I had sometimes seen in Bussy's company. He was indeed dead. The blood was already thickening about the hole that a sword had made in his doublet.

The next day the whole court was talking of the wrath of the Duke of Anjou at this assault upon his first gentleman-in-waiting. I was ashamed of having profited by the influence of De Quelus, who, I found, had not recognized me on the previous evening. Anjou's rage continued deep. He showed it by absenting himself from the wedding of Saint-Luc, one of De Quelus's companions in the King's favor and in the attack on Bussy. Catherine, knowing how the King's authority was weakened by the squabbles between him and his brother, took the Duke out to Vincennes for a walk in the park and a dinner at the château, that his temper might cool.

She persuaded him to show a conciliatory spirit and attend the marriage ball to be held that night in the great hall of the Louvre. This was more than she could persuade Marguerite to do, who accompanied mother and son to Vincennes, sharing the feelings of the Duke for three reasons, — her love for him, her hatred for her brother, the King, and her friendship for Bussy d'Amboise. It would have been well had the Duke been, like his sister, proof against his mother's persuasion. For, when he arrived at the ball, he was received by the King's gentlemen with derisive looks, and one of them, smiling insolently in the Duke's piggish, pock-marked face, said, "Doubtless you have come so late because the night is most favorable to your appearance."

Suppose yourself in the Duke's place, and imagine his resentment. He turned white and left the ball. Catherine must have had to use her utmost powers to keep peace in the royal family the next day.

On the second morning after the ball, I heard, from De Rilly, that the King had put his brother under arrest, and kept him guarded in the Duke's own apartment, lest he should leave Paris and lead the rebellion which the King had to fear, not only on its own account, but because of the further disrepute into which it would bring him with his people. The King, doubtless, soon saw, or was made to see, that

this conduct towards his brother — who had many supporters in France and was then affianced to Queen Elizabeth of England — would earn only condemnation; for, on the day after the arrest, he caused the court to assemble in Catherine's apartments, and there De Quelus went ironically through the form of an apology to the Duke, and a reconciliation with Bussy. The exaggerated embrace which Bussy gave De Quelus made everybody laugh, and showed that this peace-making was not to be taken seriously. Soon after it, Bussy d'Amboise and several of his followers left Paris.

The next thing I saw, which had bearing on the difference between the King and Monsieur his brother, was the procession of penitents in which Monsieur accompanied the King through the streets, after the hollow reconciliation. I could scarcely convince myself that the sanctimonious-looking person, in coarse penitential robe, heading the procession through the mire and over the stones of Paris, from shrine to shrine, was the dainty King whom I had beheld in sumptuous raiment in the gallery of the Louvre. The Duke of Anjou, who wore ordinary attire, seemed to take to this mummery like a bear, ready to growl at any moment. His demeanor was all that the King's gentlemen could have needed as a subject for their quips and jokes.

Two evenings after this, I was drinking in the public room of an inn, near my lodgings in the town, when a young gentleman named Malerain, who, though not a Scot, was yet one of the Scotch body-guard, sat down at my table to share a bottle with me.

"More amusement at the palace," he said to me. "To think that, any one of these nights, I may be compelled to use force against the person of the King's brother, and that some day he may be King! I wonder if he will then bear malice?"

"What is the new trouble at the Louvre?" I asked.

"It is only the old trouble. Monsieur has been muttering again, I suppose, and this, with the fact that Bussy d'Amboise keeps so quiet outside of Paris, has led the King to fear that Monsieur has planned to escape to the country. At least, it has been ordered that every member of the Duke's household, who does not have to attend at his retiring, must leave the palace at night; and Messieurs de l'Archant, De Losses, and the other captains, have received orders from the King that, if Monsieur attempts to go out after dark, he must be stopped. Suppose it becomes my duty to stop him? That will be pleasant, will it not? To make it worse, I am devoted to a certain damsel who is devoted to Queen Marguerite, who is devoted to Monsieur, her

brother. And here I am inviting misfortune, too, by drinking wine on the first Friday in Lent. I ought to have followed the example of the King, who has been doing penance all day in the chapel of the Hôtel de Bourbon."

"Let us hope that the King will be rewarded for his penance by the submission of Monsieur. I, for one, hope that if Monsieur attempts to get away, he will run across some Scotchman of the Guard who will not scruple to impede a prince of France. For if he should lead a Huguenot army against the King, I, as one of the Guards, might be called on to oppose my fellow-Protestants."

"Oh, the Duke does not wish to join the Huguenots. All he desires is to go to the Netherlands, where a throne awaits him if he will do a little fighting for it."

"I fear he would rather revenge himself on the King for what he has had to endure at court."

Presently Malerain left to go on duty at the Louvre, and soon I followed, to take up my station in sight of the window where Mlle. d'Arency slept. The night, which had set in, was very dark, and gusts of cold wind came up from the Seine. The place where, in my infatuation and affectation, I kept my lover's watch, was quite deserted. The Louvre loomed up gigantic before me, the lights gleaming feebly in a few of its many windows, serving less

to relieve its sombre aspect than to suggest unknown, and, perhaps, sinister doings within.

I laugh at myself now for having maintained those vigils by night beneath a court lady's window; but you will presently see that, but for this boyish folly, my body would have been sleeping in its grave these many years past, and I should have never come to my greatest happiness.

Suddenly my attention was attracted to another window than that on which I had fixed my gaze. This other window appertained to the apartments of the King's sister, Queen Marguerite, and what caused me to transfer my attention to it was the noise of its being opened. Then a head was thrust out of it, — the small and graceful head of Marguerite herself. She looked down at the moat beneath, and in either direction, and apparently saw no one, I being quite in shadow; then she drew her head in.

Immediately a rope was let down into the moat, whose dry bed was about five times a tall man's length below the window, which was on the second story. Out of the window came a man of rather squat figure, who let himself boldly and easily down the rope. As soon as he had reached the bed of the moat, he was followed out of the window and down the rope by a second man, who came bunglingly, as if in great trepidation. This person, in his haste, let go the rope before he was quite down,

but landed on his feet. Then a third figure came out from the chamber and down the cable, whereupon Marguerite's head again appeared in the opening, and I could see the heads of two waiting-women behind her. But the Queen of Navarre manifestly had no intention of following the three men. These now clambered up the side of the moat, and the one who had been first down turned and waved her a silent adieu, which she returned with a graceful gesture of her partly bare arm. The three men then rapidly plunged into one of the abutting streets and were gone. All this time I stood inactive and unobserved.

Marguerite remained at the window to cast another look around. Suddenly, from out the darkness at the base of the Louvre, as if risen from the very earth at the bottom of the moat, sprang the figure of a man, who started toward the guard-house as if his life depended on his speed. Marguerite drew her head in at once with a movement of great alarm. An instant later the rope was drawn up and the window closed.

Two conjectures came into my head, one after the other, each in a flash. The one was that Marguerite had availed herself of the fraternal quarrel that occupied the King's attention to plan an escape to her husband, King Henri of Navarre, and that these three men had gone from a consultation in her

apartments to further the project. The other conjecture was that they were but some of Monsieur's followers who had transgressed the new rule, requiring their departure from the palace at nightfall, and had taken this means of leaving to avoid discovery. If the former conjecture embodied the truth, my sympathies were with the plot; for it little pleased me that the wife of our Huguenot leader should remain at the French court, a constant subject of scandalous gossip. If the second guess was correct, I was glad of an opportunity to avert, even slight, trouble from the wilful but charming head of Marguerite. In either case, I might serve a beautiful woman, a queen, the wife of a Huguenot king. Certainly, if that man, paid spy or accidental interloper, should reach the guard-house with information that three men had left the Louvre by stealth, the three men might be overtaken and imprisoned, and great annoyance brought to Marguerite. All this occupied my mind but an instant. Before the man had taken ten steps, I was after him.

He heard me coming, looked around, saw my hand already upon my sword-hilt, and shouted, "The guard! Help!" I saw that, to avoid a disclosure, I must silence him speedily; yet I dared not kill him, for he might be somebody whose dead body found so near the palace would lead to endless investigations, and in the end involve Marguerite, —

for suppose that the King had set him to watch her? Therefore I called to him, "Stop and face me, or I will split you as we run!"

The man turned at once, as if already feeling my sword-point entering his back. Seeing that I had not even drawn that weapon, he, himself, drew a dagger and raised it to strike. But I was too quick and too long of arm for him. With my gloved fist I gave him a straight blow on the side of the chin, and he dropped like a felled tree, at the very moat's edge, over which I rolled him that he might recover in safety from the effects of the shock.

I knew that, when he should awake, he would not dare inform the guard, for the three men would then be far away, and he would have no evidence to support his story. He would only put himself in danger of having fabricated a false accusation against the King's sister.

I deemed it best to go from the vicinity of the Louvre at once, and I did so, with a last wistful look at the windows behind which Mlle. d'Arency might or might not be reposing. I did not reappear there until the next morning. The first person I then met was Malerain, who was coming from the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where he had been making up for previous neglect of devotions.

"Well," I said, as I stood before him, and twisted my up-shooting mustaches, in unconscious imitation

of him, "I trust you found your quarter on duty last night an easy one. You must thank me for saving you some labor."

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a look of sudden interest.

"Nothing, only that you might have been called on to give chase to some flying bird or other, if I had not knocked down a rascal who was running to inform the guard."

"And you saw the bird fly?" he said, with increasing astonishment.

"From an opening in that great cage," I replied, looking towards the Louvre.

"Then I, for myself, am glad you knocked down the said rascal who would have made falçons of us to bring the bird down. But be more cautious. Suppose what you did should reach the ears of the King?"

"Why should the King concern himself?"

"Monsieur, is it possible that you don't know that the bird that flew from the Louvre last night was the Duke of Anjou?"

It was now my turn to stare in astonishment.

"But," I said, "what use for him to leave the palace? There would be the gates of Paris to pass."

"There is more than one way to cross the fortifications of Paris, especially when one has such an ally as Bussy d'Amboise, free, to arrange matters.

Monsieur is at this moment certainly on his way to some stronghold of his own. The King is mad with rage. Queen Marguerite is looking innocent and astonished, but I'll wager she had a hand in this evasion. My friend, I am under obligations to you!"

"How?"

"Why, since Queen Marguerite undoubtedly rejoices at her favorite brother's escape, and you helped to make it good, she owes you gratitude. So do all her maids, who, naturally, share in her feelings and benefit by her joy. Now, that gratitude extends of course to your friends, of whom I am one. Therefore a good turn is due me from one of those maids in particular, and for that I am obliged to you!"

I laughed at this fantastic extension of a debt of gratitude. "Doubtless," I said; "but since neither Marguerite nor the maid knows anything about my share in the matter, I don't see how you are going to collect the debt."

Malerain said nothing, but there was already that in his mind which, absurd as it might seem at that time, was to save me when death should rise threateningly about me on every side. It is a world in which much comes from little.

I was somewhat agitated at realizing that I had been the means of aiding an escape which might result in opposing the troops of the King to those of cer-

tain Huguenot leaders; but this thought was suddenly driven from my mind by a sight which caused me to leave Malerain abruptly, and make for one of the streets that led from the Louvre to the midst of the town.

It was Mlle. d'Arency, mounted on a plumed horse, with tassellated trappings, which was led by a young equerry who wore Catherine's colors, and followed by two mounted lackeys in similar livery. Beside her rode the stout, elderly woman who usually attended her. Mlle. d'Arency wore a mask of black velvet, but that could not conceal her identity from eyes to which every line of her pretty head, every motion of her graceful person, had become familiar in actual contemplation and in dreams. Her cloak and gown were, alike, of embroidered velvet of the color of red wine, as was the velvet toque which sat perched on her dark brown hair.

I followed her at some distance, resolved to find an opportunity for a seemingly accidental meeting. I supposed that she was going to visit some of the shops, — perhaps for the Queen-mother, perhaps for herself.

She led me on and on, until I began to wonder what could be her destination. She avoided the streets of fine shops, such as were patronized by the court, skirted market-places, and continued, in a general easterly direction, until she had crossed both

the Rue St. Denis and the Rue St. Martin. At last, turning out of the Rue St. Antoine, she reached, by a little street lined with bakeries, a quiet square before a small church, of which I never even learned the name. She and the stout woman dismounted, and entered the church, leaving her male attendants outside with the horse.

"Oho," I mused, stopping at the door of a pastry-cook's at the place where the little street joined the square; "she chooses an obscure place for her devotions. Evidently she prefers to mingle solitude with them, so I must not disturb her."

I decided, therefore, to wait at the pastry-cook's till she should come out, and then to encounter her as if by chance. I would have, at least, a word in payment for having come so far afoot.

The pastry-cook must have been convinced of two things before Mlle. d'Arency came out of church: first, that his fortune was made if this new customer, myself, should only continue to patronize him; second, that there existed, at least, one human stomach able to withstand unlimited quantities of his wares.

I stood back in the shop, devouring one doughy invention after another, with my ear alert for the sound of her horse's hoofs on the stones. At last it occurred to me that she might have left the square by some other street. I made for the door of the shop to look. As I did so, a man rapidly passed

the shop, going from the square towards the Rue St. Antoine. Was not that figure known to me? I hastened to the street. My first glance was towards the church. There stood her horse, and her three attendants were walking up and down in the sunlight. Then I looked after the man; I thought that the figure looked like that of De Noyard.

He disappeared into the Rue St. Antoine, having given me no opportunity to see his face. I would have followed, to make sure, roused into an intolerable jealousy at the idea of a secret meeting between Mlle. d'Arency and him, but that I now heard the full melodious voice of the lady herself. Looking around, I saw her on the steps of the church, with her middle-aged companion. At that instant her eyes met mine.

I advanced, with an exaggerated bow, sweeping the stones of the street with the plumes of my hat.

"So it is true!" I said, making no effort to control my agitation, and restraining my voice only that the lackeys might not hear; "you love that man!"

She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then said, "Do you mean M. de Noyard?"

"Ah, you admit it!"

"I admit nothing. But if I did love him, what right would you have to call me to account?"

"The right of a man who adores you, mademoiselle."

"That is no right at all. A man's right concerning a woman must be derived from her own actions. But come inside the church, monsieur."

She made a gesture to her attendants, and reëntered the church. I followed her. We stood together before the font in the dim light.

"And now," she continued, facing me, "suppose I grant that I have so acted as to give you a right to question me; what then? Is it my fault that you have followed me this morning? Is it, then, any more my fault that I have been followed, also, by M. de Noyard?"

"But he must have been here before you."

"What does that prove? A score of people in the Louvre knew yesterday that I was coming to this church to-day."

"But so deserted a church, — so out of the way! Who would come here from the Louvre but for a tryst?"

She smiled, indulgently. "Can a thing have no cause except the obvious one?" she said. "I visit this church once every month, because, obscure though it be, it is associated with certain events in the history of my ancestors."

"But," I went on, though beginning to feel relieved, "if M. de Noyard was thrusting his

presence on you, why did he leave before you did?"

"Probably because he knew that I would not leave the church while he remained to press his company upon me outside."

The low tones that we had to use, on account of our surroundings, gave our conversation an air of confidence and secrecy that was delicious to me; and now her voice fell even lower, when she added:

"I take the pains to explain these things to you, monsieur, because I do not wish you to think that I have intrigues;" and she regarded me fixedly with her large gray eyes, which in the dimness of the place were darker and more lustrous than usual.

Delightfully thrilled at this, I made to take her hand and stoop to kiss it, but stopped for a last doubt.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I think you only the most adorable woman in the world. But there is one thing which has cost me many a sleepless hour, many a jealous surmise. If I could be reassured as to the nature of your errand that night when I first saw you —"

"Oh!" she laughed, "I was coming from an astrologer's."

"But you were not coming from the direction of Ruggieri's house."

"There are many astrologers in Paris, besides

Ruggieri. Although the Queen-mother relies implicitly on him, one may sometimes get a more pleasing prediction from another; or, another may be clear on a point on which he is vague."

"But the hour —"

"I took the time when I was not on duty, and he kept me late. It was for a friend that I visited the astrologer, — a friend who was required in the palace all that evening. The astrologer had to be consulted that night, as my friend wished to be guided in a course that she would have to take the next morning. Now, Monsieur Curiosity, are you satisfied?"

This time I took her hand and pressed my lips upon it.

She was silent for a moment, noting the look of admiration on my face. Then, quickly, and in little more than a whisper, she said:

"I have answered your questions, though not admitting your right to ask them. Would you know how to gain that right?"

"Tell me!" I said, my heart beating rapidly with elation.

"Challenge M. de Noyard, and kill him!"

I stared in astonishment.

"Now you may know whether or not I love him," she added.

"But, mademoiselle, — why —"

"Ah, that is the one thing about which I must

always refuse to be questioned! I ask you this service. Will you grant it?"

"If he has given you offence," I said, "certainly I will seek him at once."

"Not a word of me is to be said between you! He must not know that I have spoken to you."

"But a man is not to be killed without reason."

"A pretext is easily invented."

"Certainly, — a pretext to hide the cause of a quarrel from the world. But the real cause ought to be known to both antagonists."

"I shall not discuss what ought or ought not to be. I ask you, will you fight this man and try to kill him? I request nothing unusual, — men are killed every day in duels. You are a good swordsman; Bussy d'Amboise himself has said so. Come! will you do this?" She looked up at me with a slight frown of repressed petulance.

"If you will assure me that he has affronted you, and permit me to let him know, privately, the cause of my quarrel."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with irritation, "must a lady give a hundred reasons when she requests a service of a gentleman?"

"One sufficient reason, when it is a service like this."

"Well, I shall give none. I desire his death, — few gentlemen would ask a further reason."

"I had not thought you so cruel, mademoiselle, as to desire the death of any man."

"God forbid that I should desire the death of any other man! So, monsieur, I must understand that you refuse to serve me in this?"

Her contemptuous look made me sigh. "Can you not see, mademoiselle, that to resolve deliberately and secretly on a man's death, and with premeditation to create a pretext for a challenge, is little better than assassination?"

"A fine excuse to avoid risking your life!"

Again I had to endure a look of profound scorn from her.

"Mademoiselle," I replied, patiently, "I would that you might see how ready I am to fight when an affront is given me or some one needs a defender."

"Oh!" she said, with an ironical smile. "Then to show yourself a lion against De Noyard, you require only that he shall affront you, or that some one shall need a defender against him! Suppose that *I* should ever be in such need?"

"You know that in your defence I would fight an army."

Her smile now lost its irony, and she assumed a look of conciliation, which I was both surprised and rejoiced to behold.

"Well, monsieur, it is pleasant to know that, if you will not take the offensive for me, you will, at

least, act readily on the defensive if the occasion comes."

Much relieved at the turn the conversation had taken, I now undertook to continue it to my advantage. After some bantering, maintained with gaiety on her part, she said that she must return to the Louvre. Then, as she would not have me accompany her in the streets, I begged her to appoint another meeting. She evaded my petition at first, but, when I took her hand and refused to release it until she should grant my request, she said, after a little submissive shrug of her shoulders:

"Very well. Follow me, at a distance, from this church, and observe a house before which I shall stop for a moment as if to adjust my cloak. It is a house that has been taken by a friend of mine, one of the Queen-mother's ladies. I shall be there to-morrow afternoon."

"Alas! To-morrow I shall be on duty till six in the evening."

"Then come at seven. Knock three times on the street door." And with that she slipped her hand from mine, and hastened lightly out of the church. I stood alone by the font, delighted and bewildered. There was so much to mystify me that I did not even search my mind forexplanations. I thought my happiness about to be attained, and left it for the future to explain, — as it did!

CHAPTER IV.

HOW LA TOURNOIRE WAS ENLIGHTENED IN THE DARK.

It was already dark when I started, on the evening appointed, for the house indicated by Mlle. d'Arency. I went without attendance, as was my custom, relying on my sword, my alertness of eye, and my nimbleness of foot. I had engaged a lackey, for whose honesty De Rilly had vouched, but he was now absent on a journey to La Tournoire, whither I had sent him with a message to my old steward. I have often wondered at the good fortune which preserved me from being waylaid, by thieving rascals, on my peregrinations, by night, through Paris streets. About this very time several gentlemen, who went well attended, were set upon and robbed almost within sight of the quarters of the provost's watch; and some of these lost their lives as well as the goods upon their persons. Yet I went fearlessly, and was never even threatened with attack.

On the way to the house, I reviewed, for the hundredth time, the conversation in the church. There

were different conjectures to be made. Mlle. d'Arency may have made that surprising request merely to convince me that she did not love De Noyard, and intending, subsequently, to withdraw it; or it may have sprung from a caprice, a desire to ascertain how far I was at her bidding, — women have, thoughtlessly, set men such tasks from mere vanity, lacking the sympathy to feel how precious to its owner is any human life other than their own; — or she may have had some substantial reason to desire his death, something to gain by it, something to lose through his continuing to live. Perhaps she had encouraged his love and had given him a promise from which his death would be the means of release easiest to her, — for women will, sometimes, to secure the smallest immunity for themselves, allow the greatest calamities to others. This arises less from an active cruelty than from a lack of imagination, an inability to suppose themselves in the places of others. I soon felt the uselessness of searching, in my own mind, for the motive of Mlle. d'Arency's desire, or pretence of desire, for the death of De Noyard. What had passed between them I could not guess. So, after the manner of youth, I gave up the question, satisfied with knowing that I had before me an interview with a charming woman, and willing to wait for disclosures until events should offer them.

The street in which the house was situated was entirely dark and deserted when I stepped into it. The house was wider than its neighbors, and each of its upper stories had two chambers overlooking the street. At the window of one of these chambers, on the second story, a light shone. It was the only light visible in any of the houses, all of which frowned down menacingly; and hence it was like a beacon, a promise of cheer and warmth in the midst of this black, cold Paris.

I knocked three times on the street door, as she had directed me. Presently the wicket at the side of the door was opened, and a light was held up to it, that my face might be seen by a pair of eyes that peered out through the aperture. A moment later the bolts of the door were drawn, and I was let in by the possessor of the eyes. This was the elderly woman who always attended Mlle. d'Arency when the latter was abroad from the palace. She had invariably shown complete indifference to me, not appearing aware of my existence, and this time she said only:

"This way, monsieur."

Protecting the flame of her lamp with her hand, she led me forward to a narrow staircase and we ascended, stopping at a landing on which opened the second story chamber whose street window had shone with light. She gave three knocks at the

door of this chamber. At the last knock, her lamp went out.

"Curse the wind!" she muttered.

So I stood with her, on the landing, in darkness, expecting the door in front of me to open, immediately, and admit me to the lighted chamber.

Suddenly I heard a piercing scream from within the chamber. It was the voice of Mlle. d'Arency.

"Help! Help!" she cried. "My God, he will kill me!"

This was followed by one long series of screams, and I could hear her running about the chamber as though she were fleeing from a pursuer.

I stood for an instant, startled.

"Good God!" cried the old woman at my elbow. "An assassin! Her enemies have planned it! Monsieur, save her life!"

And the dame began pounding on the door, as if to break into the room to assist her mistress.

I needed no more than this example. Discovering that the door was locked on the inside, and assuming that Mlle. d'Arency, in the flight which she maintained around the room, could not get an opportunity to draw the bolt, I threw my weight forward, and sent the door flying open on its hinges.

To my astonishment, the chamber was in complete darkness. Mlle. d'Arency had doubtless knocked the light over in her movements around the room.

She was still screaming at the top of her voice, and running from one side to another. The whiteness of the robe she wore made it possible to descry her in the absence of light.

I stood for a second, just inside the threshold, and drew my sword. At first, I could not see by whom or what she was threatened; but I heard heavy footsteps, as of some one following her in her wild course about the place. Then I made out, vaguely, the figure of a man.

"Fear not, mademoiselle!" I cried.

"Oh, monsieur!" she screamed. "Save me! Save my life!"

I thrust my sword at the figure of the man. An ejaculation of pain told me that it touched flesh. A second later, I heard a sword slide from its scabbard, and felt the wind of a wild thrust in my direction.

At this moment, Mlle d'Arency appeared between me and the street window of the room. There was enough light from the sky to enable her head and shoulders to stand out darkly against the space of the window. Her head was moving with the violent coming and going of her breath, and her shoulders were drawn up in an attitude of the greatest fright. Is it any wonder that I did not stop to ascertain who or what her assailant might be, or how he had come there? I could make out only that the man in the darkness was a large and heavy one, and

wielded a swift blade. All other thoughts were lost in the immediate necessity of dealing with him. The extreme terror that she showed gave me a sense of his being a formidable antagonist; the prompt response that he had given to my own thrust showed that he was not to be quelled by a mere command. In fine, there was nothing to do but fight him as best I could in the blackness; and I was glad for so early an opportunity to show Mlle. d'Arency how ready I was to do battle for her when I found her threatened with danger.

From the absence of any sound or other demonstration, except what was made by Mlle. d'Arency and the man and myself, I knew that we three were the only ones in the room. The elderly woman had not entered with me, — a fact whose strangeness, in view of the great desire she had first evinced to reach her mistress's side, did not occur to me until afterward.

I made another thrust at the man, but, despite the darkness, he parried it with his sword; and a quick backward step was all that saved me from his prompt reply. Angered at having to give ground in the presence of the lady, I now attacked in turn, somewhat recklessly, but with such good luck as to drive him back almost to the window. Mlle. d'Arency gave another terrified scream when he came near her, and she ran past me towards the

door of the apartment. Both my antagonist and myself were now beginning to have a clearer impression of each other's outlines, and there was sharp sword-work between us by the window. As we stood there, breathing rapidly with our exertion and excitement, I heard the door close through which I had entered. I knew from this that Mlle. d'Arency had left the chamber, and I was glad that she was out of danger. It was natural that she should close the door, instinct impelling her to put any possible barrier between her assailant and herself.

The man and myself were alone together to maintain the fight which, having once entered, and being roused to the mood of contest, I had no thought of discontinuing now that Mlle. d'Arency was out of immediate danger. It had reached a place at which it could be terminated only by the disarming, the death, or the disabling of one of us.

I gradually acquired the power of knowing all my opponent's movements, despite the darkness. I supposed that he was equipped with dagger as well as with sword, but as he made no move to draw the shorter weapon, I did not have recourse to mine. Though I would not take an advantage over him, even in the circumstances, yet I was not willing to be at a disadvantage. Therefore, as he was not encumbered with cloak or mantle, I em-

ployed a breathing moment to tear off my own cloak and throw it aside, not choosing to use it on my left arm as a shield unless he had been similarly guarded.

So we lunged and parried in the darkness, making no sound but by our heavy breathing and an occasional ejaculation and the tramping of our feet, the knocking of our bodies against unseen pieces of furniture, and the clashing of our blades when they met. Each of us fenced cautiously at times, and at times took chances recklessly.

Finally, in falling back, he came to a sudden stop against a table, and the collision disturbed for an instant his control over his body. In that instant I felt a soft resistance encounter my sword and yield to it. At once, with a feeling of revulsion, I drew my sword out of the casing that his flesh had provided, and stood back. Something wet and warm sprinkled my face. The man gave a low moan and staggered sideways over towards the window. Then he plunged forward on his face. I stooped beside him and turned him over on his back, wetting my gloves with the blood that gushed from his wound and soaked his doublet. At that moment a splash of moonlight appeared on the floor, taking the shape of the window. His head and shoulders lay in this illumined space. I sprang back in horror, crying out his name:

"De Noyard! My God, it is you!"

"Yes, monsieur," he gasped, "it is De Noyard. I have been trapped. I ought to have suspected."

"But I do not understand, monsieur. Surely you could not have attacked Mlle. d'Arency?"

"Attacked her! I came here by her appointment!"

"But her cry for help?"

"It took me by complete surprise. There was a knock on the door —"

"Yes, — mine. I, too, came by her appointment!"

"Mademoiselle instantly put out the light and began to scream. I thought that the knock frightened her; then that she was mad. I followed to calm her. You entered; you know the rest."

"But what does it mean?"

"Can you not see?" he said, with growing faintness. "We have been tricked, — I, by her pretense of love and by this appointment, to my death; you, by a similar appointment and her screams, to make yourself my slayer. I ought to have known! she belongs to Catherine, to the Queen-mother. Alas, monsieur! easily fooled is he who loves a woman!"

Then I remembered what De Rilly had told me, — that De Noyard's counsels to the Duke of Guise were an obstacle to Catherine's design of conciliating that powerful leader, who aspired to the throne on which her son was seated.

"No, no, monsieur!" I cried, unwilling to admit

Mlle. d'Arency capable of such a trick, or myself capable of being so duped. "It cannot be that; if they had desired your death, they would have hired assassins to waylay you."

Yet I knew that he was right. The strange request that Mlle. d'Arency had made of me in the church was now explained.

A kind of smile appeared, for a moment, on De Noyard's face, struggling with his expression of weakness and pain.

"Who would go to the expense of hiring assassins," he said, "when honest gentlemen can be tricked into doing the work for nothing? Moreover, when you hire assassins, you take the risk of their selling your secret to the enemy. They are apt to leave traces, too, and the secret instigator of a deed may defeat its object by being found out."

"Then I have to thank God that you are not dead. You will recover, monsieur."

"I fear not, my son. I do not know how much blood I lose at every word I speak. *Parbleu!* you have the art of making a mighty hole with that toy of yours, monsieur!"

This man, so grave and severe in the usual affairs of life, could take on a tone of pleasantry while enduring pain and facing death.

"Monsieur," I cried, in great distress, "you must

not die. I will save you. I shall go for a surgeon. Oh, my God, monsieur, tell me what to do to save your life!"

"You will find my lackeys, two of them, at the cabaret at the next corner. It is closed, but knock hard and call for Jacques. Send him to me, and the other for a surgeon."

De Noyard was manifestly growing weaker, and he spoke with great difficulty. Not daring to trust to any knowledge of my own as to immediate or temporary treatment of his wound, I made the greatest haste to follow his directions. I ran out of the chamber, down the stairs, and out to the street, finding the doors neither locked nor barred, and meeting no human being. Mlle. d'Arency and her companion had silently disappeared.

I went, in my excitement, first to the wrong corner. Then, discovering my blunder, I retraced my steps, and at last secured admittance to the place where De Noyard's valets tarried.

To the man who opened the door, I said, "Are you Jacques, the serving-man of Monsieur de Noyard?"

"I am nobody's serving man," was the reply, in a tone of indignation; but a second man who had come to the door spoke up, "I am Jacques."

"Hallo, Monsieur de la Tournoire," came a voice from a group of men seated at a table. "Come and

join us, and show my friends how you fellows of the French Guards can drink!"

It was De Rilly, very merry with wine.

"I cannot, De Rilly," I replied, stepping into the place. "I have very important business elsewhere." Then I turned to Jacques and said, quietly, "Go, at once, to your master, and send your comrade for a surgeon to follow you there. Do you know the house in which he is?"

The servant made no answer, but turned pale. "Come!" he said to another servant, who had joined him from an obscure corner of the place. The two immediately lighted torches and left, from which fact I inferred that Jacques knew where to find his master.

"What is all this mystery?" cried De Rilly, jovially, rising and coming over to me, while the man who had opened the door, and who was evidently the host, closed it and moved away. "Come, warm yourself with a bottle! Why, my friend, you are as white as a ghost, and you look as if you had been perspiring blood!"

"I must go, at once, De Rilly. It is a serious matter."

"Then hang me if I don't come, too!" he said, suddenly sobered, and he grasped his cloak and sword. "That is, unless I should be *de trop*."

"Come. I thank you," I said; and we left the place together.

"Whose blood is it?" asked De Rilly, as we hurried along the narrow street, back to the house.

"That of M. de Noyard."

"What? A duel?"

"A kind of duel, — a strange mistake!"

"The devil! Won't the Queen-mother give thanks! And won't the Duke of Guise be angry!"

"M. de Noyard is not dead yet. His wound may not be fatal."

I led the way into the house and up the steps to the apartment. It was now lighted up by the torch which Jacques had brought. De Noyard was still lying in the position in which he had been when I left him. The servant stood beside him, looking down at his face, and holding the torch so as to light up the features.

"How do you feel now, monsieur?" I asked, hastening forward.

There was no answer. The servant raised his eyes to me, and said, in a tone of unnatural calmness, "Do you not see that he is dead, M. de la Tournoire?"

Horror-stricken, I knelt beside the body. The heart no longer beat; the face was still, — the eyes stared between unquivering lids, in the light of the torch.

"Oh, my God! I have killed him!" I murmured.

"Come away. You can do nothing here," said De Rilly, quietly. He caught me by the shoulder, and led me out of the room.

"Let us leave this neighborhood as soon as possible," he said, as we descended the stairs. "It is most unfortunate that the valet knows your name. He heard me speak it at the tavern, and he will certainly recall also that I hailed you as one of the French Guards."

"Why is that unfortunate?" I asked, still deprived of thought by the horror of having killed so honorable a gentleman, who had not harmed me.

"Because he can let the Duke of Guise know exactly on whom to seek vengeance for the death of De Noyard."

"The Duke of Guise will seek vengeance?" I asked, mechanically, as we emerged from that fatal house, and turned our backs upon it.

"Assuredly. He will demand your immediate punishment. You must bespeak the King's pardon as soon as possible. That is necessary, to protect oneself, when one has killed one's antagonist in a duel. The edicts still forbid duels, and one may be made to pay for a victory with one's life, if the victim's friends demand the enforcement of the law, — as in this case the Duke of Guise surely will demand."

"M. de Quelus can, doubtless, get me the King's

pardon," I said, turning my mind from the past to the future, from regret to apprehension. The necessity of considering my situation prevented me from contemplating, at that time, the perfidy of Mlle. d'Arency, the blindness with which I had let myself be deceived, or the tragic and humiliating termination of my great love affair.

"If M. de Quelus is with you, you are safe from the authorities. You will then have only to guard against assassination at the hands of Guise's followers."

"I shall go to M. de Quelus early in the morning," I said.

"By all means. And you will not go near your lodgings until you have assured your safety against arrest. You must reach the King before the Duke can see him; for the Duke will not fail to hint that, in killing De Noyard, you were the instrument of the King or of the Queen-mother. To disprove that, the King would have to promise the Duke to give you over to the authorities. And now that I think of it, you must make yourself safe before the Queen-mother learns of this affair, for she will advise the King to act in such a way that the Duke cannot accuse him of protecting you. My friend, it suddenly occurs to me that you have got into a rather deep hole!"

"De Rilly," I asked, with great concern, "do you

think that I was the instrument of Catherine de Medici in this?"

"Certainly not!" was the emphatic answer. "The fight was about a woman, was it not?"

"A woman was the cause of it," I answered, with a heavy sigh. "But how do you know?"

"To tell the truth," he said, "many people have been amused to see you make soft eyes at a certain lady, and to see De Noyard do likewise. Neither young men like you, nor older men like him, can conceal these things."

Thus I saw that even De Rilly did not suspect the real truth, and this showed me how deep was the design of which I had been the tool. Everybody would lay the quarrel to rivalry in love. The presence of so manifest a cause would prevent people from hitting on the truth. Mlle. d'Arency had trusted to my youth, agility, and supposed skill to give me the victory in that fight in the dark; and then to circumstances to disclose who had done the deed. "It was De Noyard's jealous rival," everybody would say. Having found a sufficient motive, no one would take the trouble to seek the real source, — to trace the affair to the instigation of Catherine de Medici. The alert mind of De Rilly, it is true, divining the equally keen mind of the Duke of Guise, had predicted that Guise might pretend a belief in such instigation, and so force the King to

avenge De Noyard, in self-vindication. Mlle. d'Arency well knew that I would not incriminate a woman, even a perfidious one, and counted also on my natural unwillingness to reveal myself as the dupe that I had been. Moreover, it would not be possible for me to tell the truth in such a way that it would appear probable. And what would I gain by telling the truth? The fact would remain that I was the slayer of De Noyard, and, by accusing the instigators, I would but compel them to demonstrate non-complicity; which they could do only by clamoring for my punishment. And how could I prove that things were not exactly as they had appeared, — that the woman's screams were not genuine: that she was not actually threatened by De Noyard? Clearly as I saw the truth, clearly as De Noyard had seen it in his last moments, it could never be established by evidence.

With bitter self-condemnation, and profound rancor against the woman whose tool I had been, I realized what an excellent instrument she had found for her purpose of ridding her mistress of an obstacle.

It was not certain that the King, himself, had been privy to his mother's design of causing De Noyard's death. In such matters she often acted without consulting him. Therefore, when De Quelus should present my case to him as merely that of a duel over a love affair, Henri would perhaps give me his assur-

ances of safety, at once, and would hold himself bound in honor to stand by them. All depended on securing these before Catherine or the Duke of Guise should have an opportunity to influence him to another course.

I felt, as I walked along with De Rilly, that, if I should obtain immunity from the punishment prescribed by edict, I could rely on myself for protection against any private revenge that the Duke of Guise might plan.

De Rilly took me to a lodging in the Rue de l'Autruche, not far from my own, which was in the Rue St. Honore. Letting myself be commanded entirely by him, I went to bed, but not to sleep. I was anxious for morning to come, that I might be off to the Louvre. I lay speculating on the chances of my seeing De Quelus, and of his undertaking to obtain the King's protection for me. Though appalled at what I had done, I had no wish to die, — the youth in me cried for life; and the more I desired life, the more fearful I became of failing to get De Quelus's intercession.

I grew many years older in that night. In a single flash, I had beheld things hitherto unknown to me: the perfidy of which a woman was capable, the falseness of that self-confidence and vanity which may delude a man into thinking himself the conqueror of a woman's heart, the danger of going,

carelessly, on in a suspicious matter without looking forward to possible consequences. I saw the folly of thoughtlessness, of blind self-confidence, of reckless trust in the honesty of others and the luck of oneself. I had learned the necessity of caution, of foresight, of suspicion; and perhaps I should have to pay for the lesson with my life.

Turning on the bed, watching the window for the dawn, giving in my mind a hundred different forms to the account with which I should make De Quelus acquainted with the matter, I passed the most of that night. At last, I fell asleep, and dreamt that I had told De Quelus my story, and he had brought me the King's pardon; again, that I was engaged in futile efforts to approach him; again, that De Noyard had come to life. When De Rilly awoke me, it was broad daylight.

I dressed, and so timed my movements as to reach the Louvre at the hour when De Quelus would be about to officiate at the King's rising. De Rilly left me at the gate, wishing me good fortune. He had to go to oversee the labors of some grooms in the King's stables. One of the guards of the gate sent De Quelus my message. I stood, in great suspense, awaiting the answer, fearing at every moment to see the Duke of Guise ride into the Place du Louvre on his way to crave an interview with the King.

At last a page came across the court with orders that I be admitted, and I was soon waiting in a gallery outside the apartments of the chamberlains. After a time that seemed very long, De Quelus came out to me, with a look of inquiry on his face.

Ignoring the speech I had prepared for the occasion, I broke abruptly into the matter.

"M. de Quelus," I said, "last night, in a sudden quarrel which arose out of a mistake, I was so unfortunate as to kill M. de Noyard. It was neither a duel nor a murder, — each of us seemed justified in attacking the other."

De Quelus did not seem displeased to hear of De Noyard's death.

"What evidence is there against you?" he asked.

"That of M. de Noyard's servant, to whom I acknowledged that I had killed his master. Other evidence may come up. What I have come to beg is your intercession with the King —"

"I understand," he said, without much interest. "I shall bring up the matter before the King leaves his bed."

"When may I expect to know?" I asked, not knowing whether to be reassured or alarmed at his indifference.

"Wait outside the King's apartments. I am going there now," he replied.

I followed him, saw him pass into the King's suite, and had another season of waiting. This was the longest and the most trying. I stood, now tapping the floor with my foot, now watching the halberdiers at the curtained door, while they glanced indifferently at me. Various officers of the court, whose duty or privilege it was to attend the King's rising, passed in, none heeding me or guessing that I waited there for the word on which my life depended. I examined the tapestry over and over again, noticing, particularly, the redoubtable expression of a horseman with lance in rest, and wondering how he had ever emerged from the tower behind him, of which the gateway was half his size.

A page came out of the doorway through which De Quelus had disappeared. Did he bring word to me? No. He glanced at me casually, and passed on, leaving the gallery at the other end. Presently he returned, preceding Marguerite, the Queen of Navarre, whom he had gone to summon.

"More trouble in the royal family," I said to myself. The King must have scented another plot, to have summoned his sister before the time for the *petite levée*. I feared that this would hinder his consideration of my case.

Suddenly a tall figure, wearing a doublet of cloth of silver, gray velvet breeches, gray mantle, and gray silk stockings, strode rapidly through the gallery, and

curtly commanded the usher to announce him. While awaiting the usher's return, he stood still, stroking now his light mustaches, and now his fine, curly blonde beard, which was little more than delicate down on his chin. As his glance roved over the gallery it fell for a moment on me, but he did not know me, and his splendid blue eyes turned quickly away. His face had a pride, a nobility, a subtlety that I never saw united in another. He was four inches more than six feet high, slender, and of perfect proportion, erect, commanding, and in the flower of youth. How I admired him, though my heart sank at the sight of him; for I knew he had come to demand my death! It was the Duke of Guise. Presently the curtains parted, he passed in, and they fell behind him.

And now my heart beat like a hammer on an anvil. Had De Quelus forgotten me?

Again the curtains parted. Marguerite came out, but this time entirely alone. As soon as she had passed the halberdiers, her eyes fell on me, but she gave no sign of recognition. When she came near me, she said, in a low tone, audible to me alone, and without seeming to be aware of my presence:

"Follow me. Make no sign, — your life depends on it!"

She passed on, and turned out of the gallery towards her own apartments. For a moment I

stood motionless; then, with a kind of instinctive sense of what ought to be done, for all thought seemed paralyzed within me, I made as if to return to the chamberlains' apartments, from which I had come. Reaching the place where Marguerite's corridor turned off, I pretended for an instant to be at a loss which way to go; then I turned in the direction taken by Marguerite. If the halberdiers, at the entrance to the King's apartments, saw me do this, they could but think I had made a mistake, and it was not their duty to come after me. Should I seek to intrude whither I had no right of entrance, I should encounter guards to hinder me.

Marguerite had waited for me in the corridor, out of sight of the halberdiers.

"Quickly, monsieur!" she said, and glided rapidly on. She led me boldly to her own apartments and through two or three chambers, passing, on the way, guards, pages, and ladies in waiting, before whom I had the wit to assume the mien of one who was about to do some service for her, and had come to receive instructions. So my entrance seemed to pass as nothing remarkable. At last we entered a cabinet, where I was alone with her. She opened the door of a small closet.

"Monsieur," she said, "conceal yourself in this closet until I return. I am going to be present at the *petite levée* of the King. Do not stir, for they

will soon be searching the palace, with orders for your arrest. Had you not come after me, at once, two of the Scotch Guards would have found you where you waited. I slipped out while they were listening to the orders that my mother added to the King's."

I fell on my knee, within the closet.

"Madame," I said, trembling with gratitude, "you are more than a queen. You are an angel of goodness."

"No; I am merely a woman who does not forget an obligation. I have heard, from one of my maids, who heard it from a friend of yours, how you knocked a too inquisitive person into the moat beneath my window. I had to burn the rope that was used that night, but I have since procured another, which may have to be put to a similar purpose!"

And, with a smile, she shut the closet door upon me.

CHAPTER V.

HOW LA TOURNOIRE ESCAPED FROM PARIS.

I HEARD the key turn in the lock, and the Queen of Navarre leave the cabinet. She took the key with her, so that a tiny beam of light came through the keyhole, giving my dark hiding-place its only illumination.

I felt complete confidence both in Marguerite's show of willingness to save me, and in her ability to do so. All I could do was to wait, and leave my future in her hands.

After a long time, I heard steps in the cabinet outside the closet door, the beam of light from the keyhole was cut off, the key turned again, the door opened, and Marguerite again stood before me.

"Monsieur," she said, "that we may talk without danger, remain in the closet. I will leave the door slightly ajar, thus, and will sit here, near it, with my 'Book of Hours,' as if reading aloud to myself. Should any one come, I can lock your door again and hide the key. Hark! be silent, monsieur!"

And as she spoke, she shut the door, locked it,

drew out the key, and sat down. I listened to learn what had caused this act of precaution.

"Madame," I heard some one say, "M. de l'Archant desires, by order of the King, to search your apartments for a man who is to be arrested, and who is thought to have secreted himself somewhere in the palace."

"Let him enter," said Marguerite. My heart stood still. Then I heard her say, in a tone of pleasantry:

"What, M. le Capitain, is there another St. Bartholomew, that people choose my apartments for refuge?"

"This time it is not certain that the fugitive is here," replied Captain de l'Archant, of the body-guard. "He is known to have been in the palace this morning, and no one answering his description has been seen to leave by any of the gates. It was, indeed, a most sudden and mysterious disappearance; and it is thought that he has run to cover in some chamber or other. We are looking everywhere."

"Who is the man?" asked Marguerite, in a tone of indifference.

"M. de la Tournoire, of the French Guards."

"Very well. Look where you please. If he came into my apartments, he must have done so while I attended the *petite levée* of the King; otherwise I should have seen him. What are you looking at?

The door of that closet? He could not have gone there without my knowledge. One of the maids locked it the other day, and the key has disappeared." Whereupon, she tried the door, herself, as if in proof of her assertion.

"Then he cannot be there," said De l'Archant, deceived by her manner; and he took his leave.

For some minutes I heard nothing but the monotonous voice of Marguerite as she read aloud to herself from her "Book of Hours."

Then she opened my door again. Through the tiny crack I saw a part of her head.

"Monsieur," she said to me, keeping her eyes upon the book, and retaining the same changeless tone of one reading aloud, "you see that you are safe, for the present. No one in the palace, save one of my maids, is aware that I know you or have reason to take the slightest interest in you. Your entrance to my apartments was made so naturally and openly that it left no impression on those who saw you come in. I have since sent every one of those persons on some errand, so that all who might happen to remember your coming here will suppose that you left during their absence. It was well that I brought you here; had I merely told you to leave the palace, immediately, you would not have known exactly how matters stood, and you would have been arrested at your lodgings, or on your way to your

place of duty. By this time, orders have gone to the city gates to prevent your leaving Paris. Before noon, not only the body-guard, the Provost of the palace, and the French and Scotch Guards will be on the lookout for you, but also the gendarmes of the Provost of Paris. That is why we must be careful, and why stealth must be used in conveying you out of Paris."

"They make a very important personage of me," I said, in a low tone.

"Hush! When you speak imitate my tone, exactly, and be silent the instant I cough. Too many people are not to be trusted. That you may understand me, you must know precisely how matters stand. This morning my mother went to see the King in his chamber before he had risen. They discussed a matter which required my presence, and I was sent for. After we had finished our family council, my mother and I remained for a few words, in private, with each other. While we were talking, M. de Quelus came in and spoke for a while to the King. I heard the King reply, 'Certainly, as he preserved you to me, my friend.' De Quelus was about to leave the King's chamber, when the Duke of Guise was announced. De Quelus waited, out of curiosity, I suppose. M. de Guise was admitted. He immediately told the King that one of his gentlemen, M. de Noyard, had been killed

by the Sieur de la Tournoire, one of the French Guards. I became interested, for I remembered your name as that of the gentleman who, according to my maid, had stopped the spy from whom I had had so much to fear. I recalled, also, that you had the esteem of my brother's faithful Bussy d'Amboise. My mother immediately expressed the greatest horror at De Noyard's death, with the greatest sympathy for M. de Guise; and she urged the King to make an example of you."

I remembered, with a deep sigh, what De Rilly had told me, — that Catherine, to prevent the Duke of Guise from laying the death of De Noyard to her, would do her utmost to bring me to punishment.

"The King looked at De Quelus," continued Marguerite. "That gentleman, seeing how things were, and, knowing that the King now wishes to seem friendly to the Duke, promptly said, 'This is fortunate. La Tournoire is now waiting for me in the red gallery; I suppose he wishes to beg my intercession. His presumption will be properly punished when the guards arrest him there.'"

I turned sick, at this revelation of treachery. This was the gentleman who owed his life to me, and, in the first outburst of gratitude, had promised to obtain for me a captaincy!

"The King," Marguerite went on, "at once ordered two of the Scotch Guards to arrest you. All

this time, I had been standing at the window, looking out, as if paying no attention. My mother stopped the guards to give them some additional direction. No one was watching me. I passed carelessly out, and you know what followed. At the *petite levée*, I learned what was thought of your disappearance, — that you had seen the Duke of Guise enter the King's apartments, had guessed his purpose, and had precipitately fled."

I did not dare tell his sister what I thought of a King who would, without hesitation or question, offer up one of his guards as a sacrifice to appease that King's greatest enemy.

"And now, monsieur," said Marguerite, still seeming to read from her book, "the King and the Queen, my mother, will make every effort to have you captured, lest it be thought that they are secretly protecting the slayer of M. de Noyard. To convince you that you may rely on me, thoroughly, I will confess that it is not solely gratitude for your service the other night that induces me to help you, — although my gratitude was great. I had seen the spy rise out of the moat and all night I was in deadly fear that he had reached the guard-house and prevented my brother's flight, or, at least, betrayed me. When I became convinced that he had not done so, I thanked Heaven for the unknown cause that had hindered him. So you may

imagine, when my maid told me that a friend of her lover's was that unknown cause, how I felt towards that friend."

"Madame," I said, with emotion, "I ought to be content to die, having had the happiness of eliciting your gratitude!"

"But I am not content that you should die, for I wish you to serve me once more, this time as a messenger to my brother, the Duke of Anjou, who is at Angers; to M. Bussy d'Amboise, who is with him; and to my husband, the King of Navarre, who is at Nerac, in Gascony. Thus it is to my own interest to procure your safe escape from Paris. And if you reach Nerac, monsieur, you cannot do better than to stay there. The King of Navarre will give you some post more worthy of you than that of a mere soldier, which you hold here."

"I enlisted in the French Guards," I hastened to explain, "because I was unknown, and a Huguenot, and could expect no higher beginning."

"For the very reason that you are a Huguenot, you can expect a great deal from the King of Navarre. His kingdom is little more than a toy kingdom, it is true, and his court is but the distant echo of the court of France, but believe me, monsieur," — and here Marguerite's voice indicated a profound conviction, — "there is a future before my husband, the King of Navarre! They do not know him.

Moreover, Paris will never be a safe place for you as long as the Duke of Guise lives. He does not forget!"

I knew that Marguerite had excellent means of knowing the Duke of Guise, and I did not dispute her assertion. Moreover, I was now quite willing to go from the city wherein I was to have achieved such great things. My self-conceit had been shaken a little.

"But if every exit is watched, how can I leave Paris?" I asked.

"The exits were watched to prevent the going of my brother Anjou," said Marguerite, "but he went. He crossed the Seine with his chamberlain, Simier, and his valet, Cangé, and went to the Abbey of St. Genevieve, of which the gardens are bounded by the city wall. The Abbot Foulon was secretly with us. M. Bussy had returned to Paris, and was waiting at the Abbey for Monsieur. They left Paris by way of the Abbey garden. The Abbot is a cautious soul, and to protect himself, in case of discovery, he had M. Bussy tie him to a chair, and after Monsieur and Bussy had joined their gentlemen, outside, and galloped off toward Angers, the Abbot came to the Louvre, and informed the King of Monsieur's escape. Now I suppose we shall have to make use of the same ingenious Foulon."

"You know what is best, madame," I said.

"But the Abbot of Saint Genevieve would not do for you, or even for me, what he would do for my brother Anjou. If he knew who you were, he might gladly seize an opportunity to offset, by giving you up, the suspicion that he had a hand in my brother's escape."

"But if there is a suspicion of that, will they not watch the Abbey now, on my account?"

"No; for you are not of my brother's party, and the Abbot would have no reason for aiding you. The question is how to make him serve us in this. I must now think and act, monsieur, and I shall have to lock you up again."

She rose and did so, and again I was left to meditate. It is astonishing how unconcerned I had come to feel, how reliant on the ingenuity of this charming princess with the small head, the high, broad forehead, the burning, black eyes the curly blonde hair, the quizzically discrete expression of face.

After some hours, during which I learned, again, the value of patience, the door was opened, and Marguerite thrust in some bread and cold meat, which she had brought with her own hand. I took it in silence, and stooped to kiss the hand, but it was too soon withdrawn, and the door locked again.

When the door next opened, Marguerite stood before it with a candle in her hand. I therefore knew that it was night. In her other hand, she held

four letters, three of them already sealed, the fourth open.

"I have made all arrangements," she said, quickly. "This letter is to the Abbot Foulon. Read it."

She handed it to me, and held the candle for me while I read:

This gentleman bears private letters to Monsieur. As he was about to depart with them, I learned that the King had been informed of his intended mission, and had given orders for his arrest at the gate. I call upon you to aid him to leave Paris, as you aided my brother Anjou. His arrest would result in a disclosure of how that matter was conducted.

MARGUERITE.

I smiled, when I had finished reading the letter.

"That letter will frighten Brother Foulon into immediate action," said Marguerite, "and he will be compelled to destroy it, as it incriminates him. Take these others. You will first go to Angers, and deliver this to the Duke of Anjou, this to M. de Bussy. Then proceed to Gascony with this, for the King of Navarre."

"And I am to start?"

"To-night. I shall let you down into the moat, as Monsieur was let down. You cannot cross the bridges of the Seine, lest you be stopped by guards at the entrances; therefore I have employed, in this matter, the same boy who served me the other night. Go immediately from the moat to that part

of the quay which lies east of the Hôtel de Bourbon. You will find him waiting there in a boat. He will take you across the river to the Quay of the Augustines, and from there you will go alone to the Abbey. When Foulon knows that you come in my name, he will at once admit you. I am sorry that there is not time to have a horse waiting for you outside the fortifications."

"Alas, I must leave my own horse in Paris! I must go forth as a deserter from the Guards!"

"It is better than going to the executioner," said Marguerite, gaily. "For the last time, monsieur, become a bird in a cage. I am about to retire. As soon as all my people are dismissed, and the palace is asleep, I shall come for you."

The door closed again upon my prison of a day. I placed the letters within my doublet, and looked to the fastening of my clothes, as a man who prepares for a race or contest. I straightened myself up in my place of concealment, and stood ready to attempt my flight from this Paris of which the King had made a cage to hold me.

More waiting, and then came Marguerite, this time without a candle. She stood in the darkness, in a white *robe de nuit*, like a ghost.

"Now, monsieur," she whispered.

I stepped forth without a word, and followed her through the cabinet into a chamber which also was

dark. Three of Marguerite's maids stood there, in silence, one near the door, the other two at the window. One of the latter held a stout stick, to the middle of which was fastened a rope, which dangled down to the floor and lay there in irregular coils. I saw this by the little light that came through the window from the clouded night sky.

Marguerite took the stick and held it across the window. It was longer than the width of the window, and hence its ends overlapped the chamber walls on either side.

"Are you ready, monsieur?" asked Marguerite, in a whisper.

"Ready, madame."

Still holding the stick in position with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and looked out. She then drew in her head, and passed the loose end of the rope out of the window. Then she looked at me, and stood a little at one side, that I might have room to pass.

Summoning a bold heart, I mounted the window-ledge, got on my knees with my face towards the chamber, caught the rope in both hands, lowered my head, and kissed one of the hands of the Queen of Navarre; then, resting my weight on my elbows, dropped my legs out of the window. Two more movements took my body after them, and presently I saw before me only the wall of the Louvre, and

was descending the rope, hand after hand, the weight of my body keeping the stick above in position.

When I was half-way down, I looked up. The wall of the palace seemed now to lean over upon me, and now to draw back from me. Marguerite was gazing down at me.

At last, looking down, I saw the earth near, and dropped. I cast another glance upward. Marguerite was just drawing in her head, and immediately the rope's end flew out of my reach.

"There's no going back the way I came!" I said, to myself, and strode along the moat to find a place where I could most easily climb out of it. Such a place I found, and I was soon in the street, alone, near where I had been wont to watch under the window of Mlle. d'Arency. I took a last look at the window of Marguerite's chamber. It was closed, and the rope had disappeared. My safety was no longer in the hands of the Queen of Navarre. She had pointed out the way for me, and had brought me thus far; henceforth, I had to rely on myself.

I shivered in the cold. I had left my large cloak beside the dead body of M. de Noyard the previous night, and had worn to the Louvre, in the morning, only a light mantle by way of outer covering.

"Blessings on the night for being so dark, and maledictions on it for being so cold!" I muttered, as I turned towards the river.

I had reached the Hôtel de Bourbon, when I heard, behind me, the sound of footsteps in accord. I looked back. It was a body of several armed men, two of them bearing torches.

Were they gendarmes of the watch, or were they guards of the King? What were they doing on my track, and had they seen me?

Probably they had not seen me, for they did not increase their gait, although they came steadily towards me. The torches, which illuminated everything near them, served to blind them to what was at a distance from them.

Fortunately, I had reached the end of the street, and so I turned eastward and proceeded along the quay, high walls on one side of me, the river on the other. It had been impossible for Marguerite to indicate to me the exact place at which the boat was to be in waiting. I did not think it best, therefore, to go to the edge of the quay and look for the boat while the soldiers were in the vicinity. They might come upon the quay at the moment of my embarking, and in that event, they would certainly investigate. So I walked on along the quay.

Presently I knew, by the sound of their steps, that they, too, had reached the quay, and that they had turned in the direction that I had taken. I was still out of the range of their torchlight.

"How far will I be made to walk by these med-

dlesome archers?" I asked myself, annoyed at this interruption, and considering it an incident of ill omen. I looked ahead, to see whither my walking would lead me.

I saw another body of gendarmes, likewise lighted by torches, just emerging from a street's end, some distance in front of me. They turned and came towards me.

I stopped, feeling for an instant as if all my blood, all power of motion, had left me. "Great God!" I thought, "I am caught between two rows of teeth."

I must wait no longer to seek the boat. Would God grant that it might be near, that I might reach it before either troop should see me?

I ran to the edge of the quay and looked over into the river. Of all the boats that lay at rest there, not one in sight was unmoored, not one contained a boatman!

The two bodies of men were approaching each other. In a few seconds the two areas of torchlight would merge together. On one side were walls, frowning and impenetrable; on the other was the river.

I took off my sword and dagger, on account of their weight, and dropped them with their sheathes into the river. I started to undo the fastening of my mantle, but the knot held; my fingers became clumsy, and time pressed. So I gave up that at-

tempt, threw away my hat, let myself over the edge of the quay, and slid quietly into the icy water. I immediately dived, and presently came to the surface at some distance from the shore. I then swam for the middle of the river. God knows what powers within me awoke to my necessity. I endured the cold, and found strength to swim in spite of the clothes that impeded my movements and added immensely to my weight.

Without looking back, I could tell, presently, from the talking on the quay that the two detachments of gendarmes had met and were standing still. Had either one descried me, there would have been loud or hurried words, but there were none. After a while, during which I continued to swim, the voices ceased, and I looked back. Two torches remained on the quay. The others were moving away, along the river. I then made a guess, which afterward was confirmed as truth. The boy sent by Marguerite had been discovered in his boat, had been taken to the guard-house, and had given such answers as led to the suspicion that he was waiting to aid the flight of some one. The captain of the Guard, thinking so to catch the person for whom the boatman waited, had sent two bodies of men out, one to occupy the spot near which the boy had been found, the other to patrol the river bank in search of questionable persons. I had arrived on the quay in the interval

between the boy's capture and the arrival of the guards.

My first intention was to reach the left bank and proceed to the Abbey of St. Genevieve. But it occurred to me that, although a boat could not pass down the river, out of Paris, at night, because of the chain stretched across the river from the Tour du Coin to the Tour de Nesle, yet a swimmer might pass under or over that chain and then make, through the faubourg outside the walls, for the open country. Neither Marguerite nor I had thought of this way of leaving Paris, because of the seeming impossibility of a man's surviving a swim through the icy Seine, and a flight in wet clothes through the February night. Moreover, there was the necessity of leaving my sword behind, and the danger of being seen by the men on guard at the towers on either side of the river. But now that necessity had driven me into the river, I chose this shorter route to freedom, and swam with the current of the Seine. In front of me lay a dark mass upon the water in the middle of the river. This was the barge moored there to support the chain which stretched, from either side, across the surface of the water, up the bank and to the Tour de Nesle on the left side, and to the Tour du Coin on the right. I might pass either to the right or to the left of this barge. Naturally, I chose to avoid the side nearest the bank from which I had

just fled, and to take the left side, which lay in the shadow of the frowning Tour de Nesle.

By swimming close to the left bank of the river, I might pass the boundary without diving under the chain, for the chain ascended obliquely from the water to the tower, leaving a small part of the river's surface entirely free. But this part was at the very foot of the tower, and if I tried passage there I should probably attract the attention of the guard. I was just looking ahead, to choose a spot midway between the barge and the left bank, when suddenly the blackness went from the face of things, a pale yellow light took its place, and I knew that the moon had come from behind the clouds. A moment later, I heard a cry from the right bank of the river, and knew that I was discovered. The shout came from the soldiers whom I had so narrowly eluded.

I knew that it was a race for life now. The soldiers would know that any man swimming the Seine on a February night was a man whom they ought to stop. I did not look back, — the one thing to do was to pass the Tour de Nesle before the guards there should be put on the alert by the cries from the right bank. So on I swam, urging every muscle to its utmost.

Presently came the crack of an arquebus, and spattering sounds behind me told me where the shot had struck the water. I turned to swim upon

my left side, and so I got a glimpse of the quay that I had left. By the hurried movement of torches, I saw that the body that had gone to patrol the river bank was returning to rejoin the other force. Of the latter, several men were unmooring and manning a large boat. I turned on my back to have a look at the sky. I saw that very soon a heavy mass of black cloud would obscure the moon. At once I turned, and made towards the left bank, as if not intending to pass the chain. I could hear the men in the boat speaking rapidly at this, as if commenting on my change of course. Again looking back, I saw that the boat had pushed off, and was making towards that point on the left bank for which I seemed to be aiming. And now I had something else to claim my attention: the sound of voices came from the Tour de Nesle. I cast a glance thither. A troop of the watch was out at last, having taken the alarm from the movements on the right bank. This troop from the Tour de Nesle was moving towards the place for which I seemed to be making; hence it was giving its attention solely to that part of the left bank which was inside the fortifications. I felt a thrill of exultation. The moon passed under the clouds. I changed my course, and struck out for the chain. The light of the torches did not reach me. Both the boat from the right bank and the watch from the Tour de Nesle continued to move towards the same

point. I approached the chain, took a long breath, dived, felt the stifling embrace of the waters for a season, rose to the surface, breathed the air of heaven again, and cast a look behind. The chain stretched between me and the distant boat and torches. I was out of Paris.

I swam on, past the mouth of the Paris moat, and then made for the left bank. Exhaustion seized me as I laid hold of the earth, but I had strength to clamber up. I fell into a sitting posture and rested my tired arms and legs. What pains of cold and heat I felt I cannot describe. Presently, with returning breath, came the strength to walk, — a strength of which I would have to avail myself, not only that I might put distance between myself and Paris, but also to keep my wet clothes from freezing. I rose and started.

Choosing not to follow the left bank of the Seine, which was unknown territory to me, I turned southeastward, in the hope of finding the road by which I had entered Paris. To reach this, I had but to traverse the Faubourg St. Germaine, along the line of the wall of Paris. I had already gone some distance along the outer edge of the moat, with the sleeping faubourg on my right, when I heard, behind me, the sound of men treading a bridge. I looked back. The bridge was that which crossed the moat from the Tour de Nesle.

Had the guards at last discovered my way of eluding pursuit, and was I now being sought outside the walls? It appeared so, for, after crossing the moat, the troop divided into two bodies, one of which went toward the left bank below the chain, where I had landed, while the other came along the moat after me. I began to run. The moon came out again.

"Look! he is there!" cried one of my pursuers. I heard their footsteps on the frozen earth, — they, too, were running. But I had the advantage in one respect: I had no weapons to impede me. The coming out of the moon did not throw me into despair; it only increased my determination to make good the escape I had carried so far. Though nature, herself, became the ally of the King of France and the Duke of Guise against me, I would elude them. I was filled with hate and resolution.

Suddenly, as I ran, it occurred to me that I was a fool to keep so near the fortifications, for, at any of the gates, guards might emerge, alarmed by the shouts of my pursuers; and even as I thought this, I looked ahead and saw a number of halberdiers coming from the Porte St. Germaine. My situation was now as it had been on the quay, with this disadvantage, that I was seen by my enemies, and this advantage, that I had a way of retreat open on my right; and I turned and sped along a street of the Faubourg St. Germaine, towards the country.

It matters not how many pursue you, if you can run faster and longer than the best of them all. Gradually, as I went, panting and plunging, onward, heedless of every obstacle, I increased the distance between me and the cries behind. Soon I was out of the faubourg, but I did not stop. I do not know what ground I went over, save that I went southward, or what village I presently went through, save that it was silent and asleep. I came upon a good road, at last, and followed it, still running, though a pain in my side warned me that soon I must halt. All my hunters had abandoned the chase now but one. Every time I half turned for a backward look, I saw this one coming after me. He had dropped his weapons, and so had enabled himself to keep up the chase. Not being weakened by a previous swim in the Seine, he was in better form than I, and I knew that he would catch me in time. And what then? He was a large fellow, but since the struggle must come, I would better let it come ere I should be utterly exhausted. So I pretended to stagger and lurch forward, and presently came to my knees and then prone upon the ground. With a grunt of triumph, the man rushed up to me, caught me by the collar of my doublet, and raised me from the ground. Hanging limp, and apparently senseless, I put him quite off his guard.

"Stand up!" he cried. "Stomach of the Pope!

Have I come so far only to take a dead man back?"

While he was trying to make me stand, I suddenly gathered all my energy into my right arm and gave him a quick blow in the pit of the stomach. With a fearful howl, he let me go and fell upon his knees. A blow in the face then made him drop as limp as I had pretended to be; and I resumed my flight, this time at a more leisurely pace.

And now all my physical powers seemed to be leaving me. Pains racked my head, and I seemed at one time to freeze and burn all over, at another time to freeze in one part and burn in another. I ached in my muscles, my bones, my stomach. At every step, I felt that it was vastly difficult to take another, that it would be ineffably sweet to sink down upon the earth and rest. Yet I knew that one taste of that sweetness meant death, and I was determined not to lose a life that had been saved from so great peril by so great effort. Despite all the soldiers at their command, the King of France and the Duke of Guise should not have their will with me. At last, — I know not how far from Paris, — I came to an inn. There were still a few crowns in my pocket. Forgetting the danger from which I had fled, not thinking that it might overtake me here, feeling only the need of immediate shelter and rest, I pounded on the door until I got

admittance. I have never had any but the vaguest recollection of my installation at that inn, so near to insensibility I was when I fell against its door. I have a dim memory of having exchanged a few words with a sleepy, stolid host; of being glad of the darkness of the night, for it prevented him from noticing my wet, frozen, begrimed, bedraggled, half-dead condition; of my bargaining for the sole occupancy of a room; of his leading me up a winding stairway to a chamber; of my plunging from the threshold to the bed as soon as the door was opened. I slept for several hours. When I awoke, it was about noon, and I was very hungry and thirsty. My clothes had dried upon me, and I essayed to put them into a fairly presentable condition. I found within my doublet the four letters, which had been first soaked and then stiffened. The now useless one addressed to the Abbot Foulon, I destroyed; then I went down to the kitchen, and saw, with relief, that it was empty. I ate and drank hurriedly but ravenously. Again the fear of capture, the impulse to put Paris further and further behind, awoke in me. I bought a peasant's cap from the landlord, telling him that the wind had blown my hat into the river the previous night, and set forth. It was my intention to walk to La Tournoire, that my money might last. Afoot I could the better turn from the road and conceal myself in

woods or fields, at any intimation of pursuit. At La Tournoire, I would newly equip myself with clothes, weapons, horse, and money; and thence I would ride to Angers, and finally away, southward, to Nerac.

It was a fine, sunlit day when I stepped from the inn to take the road going southward. I had not gone four steps when I heard horses coming from the north. I sought the shelter of a shed at the side of the inn. There was a crack between two boards of this shed, through which I could look. The horses came into sight, ten of them. The riders were brown-faced men, all armed with swords and pistols, and most of them having arquebusses slung over their backs. Their leader was a large, broad, black-bearded man, with a very ugly red face, deeply scarred on the forehead, and with fierce black eyes. He and his men rode up to the inn, beat on the door, and, when the host came, ordered each a stirrup-cup. When the landlord brought the wine, the leader asked him some questions in a low tone. The landlord answered stupidly, shaking his head, and the horsemen turned to resume their journey. Just as they did so, there rode up, from the south, a merry-looking young cavalier followed by two mounted servants. This newcomer gaily hailed the ill-looking leader of the troop from the north with the words:

"Ah, M. Barbemouche, whither bound, with your back towards Paris?"

"For Anjou, M. de Berquin," growled the leader.

"What!" said the other, with a grin. "Have you left the Duke of Guise to take service with the Duke of Anjou?"

"No, M. le Vicomte," said the leader. "It is neither for nor against the Duke of Anjou that we go into his province. It is to catch a rascal who may be now on the way to hide on his estate there, and whom my master, the Duke of Guise, would like to see back in Paris."

"Indeed? Who is it that has given the Duke of Guise so great a desire for his company?"

"The Sieur de la Tournoire," replied Barbemouche. "Have you met him on the road?"

"I have never heard of him, before," said the young cavalier, indifferently; and he rode on northward, while Barbemouche and his men silently took the opposite direction.

He had never heard of me, as he said, nor I of him; yet he was to know much of me at a time to come, was the Vicomte de Berquin; and so was Barbemouche, the scowling man who was now riding towards Anjou in search of me.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HE FLED SOUTHWARD.

When one is pursued, one's best course is to pursue the pursuer. So, when M. Barbemouche and his troop of Guisards had gone some distance down the road, I came forth from the shed and followed them, afoot, keeping well to the roadside, ready to vanish, should any of them turn back. It was evident that Barbemouche had little or no hope of catching me on the road. His plan was to surprise me at my château, or to lie there in wait for me. He had not shown any persistence in questioning the landlord. The latter, through laziness or sheer stupidity, or a fear of incurring blame for having sheltered a fugitive, had not given him any information that might lead him to suspect that the man he was seeking was so near. So I could follow, in comparative safety, into Anjou.

Their horses constantly increased the distance between the Guise man-hunters and me, their desired prey. In a few hours they were out of sight. Thus they would arrive at La Tournoire long before I

could. Not finding me there, they would probably put the servants under restraint, and wait in ambush for me. Several days of such waiting, I said to myself, would exhaust their patience; thereupon, they would give up the hope of my seeking refuge at La Tournoire, and would return to their master. My best course, therefore, would be to take my time on the road, to be on the alert on coming near La Tournoire, and to lie in hiding until I should be assured of their departure. In order to consume as much time as I could, and to wear out the enemy's patience without putting my own to the test, I decided to go first to Angers, deliver Marguerite's letters to Monsieur and Bussy d'Amboise, and then make for La Tournoire. Therefore, when, after a few days of walking, I came to LeMans, I did not turn southward, towards La Tournoire, but followed the Sarthe southwestward to Angers.

On this journey, I skirted Rambouillet, Anneau, and the other towns in my way, and avoided large inns, for fear of coming up with the Guise party. I made my money serve, too, by purchasing cheaply the hospitality of farmers and woodmen. My youth had withstood well the experiences attending my escape from Paris, and enabled me to fare on the coarse food of the peasantry. There was plenty of healthy blood in my veins to keep me warm. Outside of my doublet, my shoulders had no covering

but the light mantle, of which I was now glad that I had been unable to rid myself in my swim down the Seine. People who saw me, with my rumpled clothes and shapeless ruff and peasant's cap, probably took me for a younger son who had endured hard fortune.

Such was my condition when I reached Angers and presented myself at the gate of the château wherein the Duke of Anjou had taken residence. There were many soldiers in and about the town, and horsemen were arriving and departing. I might not easily have obtained audience of the Duke, had not Bussy d'Amboise ridden up at the head of a small troop of horse, while I was waiting at the gate. I called out his name, and he recognized me, showing surprise at my appearance. I gave him his letter, and he had me conducted to the Duke, who was striding up and down the hall of the château. His mind was evidently preoccupied, perhaps already with fears as to the outcome of his rebellious step, and he did not look at me when he took the letter. His face brightened, though, when he saw the inscription in Marguerite's handwriting, and he went, immediately, to a window to read the letter. Bussy d'Amboise, who had dismounted and come in with me, now beckoned me to follow him, and when we were outside, he offered to supply me with a horse, money and arms, proposing that I enter the service

of the Duke of Anjou. But I told him that I was bound for Gascony, and when he still offered me some equipment, I protested that I would refurnish myself at my own château; so he let me go my way. I could see that he was in haste to break the seal of Marguerite's letter.

I had gone two leagues or more northward from Angers, and was about to turn eastward toward La Tournoire, when I saw a long and brilliant cortege approaching from the direction of Paris. Several men-at-arms were at the head, then came a magnificent litter, then a number of mounted ladies and gentlemen, followed by a host of lackeys, a number of mules with baggage, and another body of soldiers. This procession was winding down the opposite hillside. The head of it was already crossing the bridge over a stream that coursed through the valley toward the Sarthe. Slowly it came along the yellow road, the soldiers and gentlemen holding themselves erect on their reined-in horses, the ladies chatting or laughing, and looking about the country, the wind stirring the plumes and trappings, the sunlight sparkling on the armor and halberds of the guards, the sword-hilts of the gentlemen, the jewels and rich stuffs which shone in the attire of the riders. There were velvet cloaks and gowns; satin and silk doublets, breeches, and hose; there were cloth of gold and cloth of silver. Here and there the cavalcade

passed clumps of trees that lined the road, and it was then like pictures you have seen in tapestry.

Concealment had lately become an instinctive act with me, and I now sought refuge in the midst of some evergreen bushes, at a little distance from the road, from which I could view the cavalcade as it passed. On it came, the riders throwing back their shoulders as they filled their lungs with the bracing country air. The day was a mild one for the time of year, and the curtains of the litter were open. Inside sat a number of ladies. With a start, I recognized two of the faces. One was Mlle. d'Arency's; the other was the Queen-mother's. Mlle. d'Arency was narrating something, with a derisive smile, to Catherine, who listened with the slightest expression of amusement on her serene face.

Catherine was going to try to persuade her son, the Duke of Anjou, to give up his insurrectionary designs and return to the court of his brother. I guessed this much, as I lay hidden in the bushes, and I heartily wished her failure. As for Mlle. d'Arency, I have no words for the bitterness of my thoughts regarding her. I grated my teeth together as I recalled how even circumstance itself had aided her. She could have had no assurance that in the combat planned by her I should kill De Noyard, or that he would not kill me, and yet what she had desired had occurred. When the troop had passed, I arose and

started for La Tournoire. It seemed to me that a sufficient number of days had now passed to tire the patience of Barbemouche, and that I might now visit my château for the short time necessary.

Nevertheless, it was with great caution that I approached the neighborhood in which all my life, until my departure for Paris, had been passed. At each bend of the road, I stopped and listened before going on. When I entered a piece of woods, I searched, with my eyes, each side of the road ahead, for a possible ambush. When I approached the top of a hill, it was with my ears on the alert for the sound of horsemen or of human feet, and, when I reached the crest, I found some spot where, lying on my stomach or crouching behind underbrush, I could survey the lowland ahead. And so, meeting no indication of peril, treading familiar and beloved ground, I at last reached the hill-top from which I would have my long-expected view of La Tournoire. It was just sunset; with beating heart, I hastened forward, risking something in my eagerness to look again upon the home of my fathers. I gazed down, ready to feast my eyes on the dear old tower, the peaceful garden, the —

And I saw only a smouldering pile of ruins, not one stone of my château left upon another, save a part of the stables, before which, heeding the desolation no more than crows are repelled by the sight of

a dead body, sat M. Barbemouche and two of his men throwing dice. Only one tree was left in the garden, and from one of its limbs hung the body of a man, through which a sword was thrust. By the white hair of the head, I knew the body was that of old Michel.

So this was the beginning of the revenge of the Duke of Guise upon a poor gentleman for having eluded him; thus he demonstrated that a follower of his might not be slain with impunity. And the Duke must have had the assurance of the King that this deed would be upheld; nay, probably the King, in his design of currying favor with his powerful subject, had previously sanctioned this act, or even suggested it, that the Duke might have no ground for suspecting him of protecting me.

Grief at the sight of the home of my youth, the house of my ancestors, laid low, gave way to rage at the powerful ones to whom that sight was due, — the Duke who despoiled me, the King who had not protected me, the Queen as whose unknowing tool I had made myself liable to this outrage. As I stood on that hill-top, in the dusk, and looked down on the ruins of my château, I declared myself, until death, the enemy to that Queen, that Duke, and that King, — most of all to that King; for, having saved the life of his favorite, having taken humble service in his Guards, and having received from him a hinted

promise of advancement, I had the right to expect from him a protection such as he gave every day to worthless brawlers.

At nightfall, I went to the hovel of a woodman, on whose fidelity I knew I could depend. At my call, he opened the door of his little hut, and received me with surprise and joy. With him was a peasant named Frolichard.

"Then you are alive, monsieur?" cried the woodman, closing the door after me, and making for me a seat on his rude bed.

"As you see," I replied. "I have come to pass the night in your hut. To-morrow I shall be off for the south."

"Alas, you have seen what they have done! I knew nothing of it until Michel was dead, and the servants came fleeing through the woods. They have gone, I know not where, and the tenants, too. All but Frolichard. As yet, the soldiers have not found this hut."

By questioning him, I learned that M. Barbemouche had denounced me as a heretic and a traitor (I could see how my desertion from the French Guards might be taken as implying intended rebellion and treason), and had told Michel that my possessions were confiscated. What authority he pretended to have, I could not learn. It was probably in wrath at not finding me that he had caused

the destruction of my château, to make sure that it might not in any circumstances shelter me again.

I well knew that, whatever my rights might be, my safety lay far from La Tournoire; and so did my means of retaliation.

"If I had but a horse and a sword left!" I said.

"There is a horse which I have been using, in my shed," replied the forester; "and I made one of the servants leave here the swords that he was carrying away in his flight. Moreover, he had filled a bag with crowns from Michel's strong box. So you need not leave entirely unprovided."

I thanked the faithful fellow as he brought forth the swords and the little bag of gold pieces from under his bed, and then I lay down to sleep. The peasant Frolichard was already dozing in a corner by the fire.

I was awakened suddenly by a shake of the shoulder. The woodman stood by the bed, with every sign of alarm on his face.

"Monsieur," he whispered, "I fear you would best eat and begone. That cursed rascal, Frolichard, left while I was asleep. I am sure that the devil has been too much for him. He has probably gone to tell the soldiers that you are here. Eat, monsieur!"

I sprang up, and saw that the forester had already prepared some porridge for me.

"It is nearly dawn," he added, as I looked around

I swallowed a few mouthfuls of the porridge, and chose the better one of the swords. Then I took up the little bag of golden crowns, and went out to mount horse. The animal that the woodman held for me was a sorry one, the ugliest and oldest of my stable.

Yet I rode blithely through the woods, happy to have again a horse under me, and a sword at my side. I knew that the forester could take care of himself as long as there should remain woods to hunt in or streams to fish in.

When I reached the road it was daylight. I made for the hill-top, and stopped for a last look at my fields. I did not have to hesitate as to my course. In my doublet was Marguerite's letter, to be borne to the King of Navarre. Yet there was another reason why I should not attach myself to the Duke of Anjou, although he was already in rebellion against the King: the look on his face, when I saw him at Angers, had convinced me that he would not hold out. Should Catherine not win him back to allegiance, his own weakness would. I would place my hopes in the future of Henri of Navarre. Nothing could, as yet, be predicted with assurance concerning this Prince, who, being the head of the house of Bourbon, which constituted the younger branch of the Royalty of France, was the highest, by blood, of the really Huguenot leaders. Some, however,

whispered that there was more in him than appeared in his amours and his adventures of the chase.

I was just about to turn my horse's head towards the south, when a man came out of my half-ruined stable and looked up at me. Instantly he called to some one in the stable, and two or three other soldiers came out. I recognized the burly form of one of these as that of Barbemouche. Another figure, a limp and cringing one, was that of Frolichard the peasant. Barbemouche gave some orders, and two or three brought horses out of the stable. I knew what all this meant.

I turned my horse, and galloped off towards the south. In a few moments I heard the footfalls of galloping horses behind me. Again I was the object of a chase.

When I had gone some distance, I looked back and saw my hunters coming, ten of them, down the hillside behind me. But the morning was bracing, and my horse had more life in him than at first sight appeared. I put another hill behind me, but in time my followers appeared at its crest. Now they gained on me, now I seemed to leave them further behind. All day this race continued. I bore directly southward, and hence passed far east of Angers. I soon made up my mind that M. Barbemouche was a man of persistence. I did not stop anywhere for food or

drink. Neither did M. Barbemouche. I crossed the Loire at Saumur. So did he.

"Very well," I said. "If my horse only holds out, I will lead you all the way to Gascony."

Once I let my horse eat and rest; twice I let him drink.

At nightfall, the sound of the hoofs behind me gradually died away. My own beast was foaming and panting, so I reined in to a walk. Near Loudun, I passed an inn whose look of comfort, I thought, would surely tempt my tired pursuers to tarry, if, indeed, they should come so far. Some hours later, coming to another and smaller inn, and hearing no sound of pursuit behind me, I decided to stop for a few hours, or until the tramp of horses' feet should disturb the silence of the night.

The inn kitchen, as I entered, was noisy with shouts and curses. One might have expected to find a whole company of soldiers there, but to my surprise, I saw only one man. This was a robust young fellow, with a big round face, piercing gray eyes, fiercely up-sprouting red mustache, and a double-pointed reddish beard. There was something irresistibly pugnacious, and yet good-natured, in the florid face of this person. He sat on a bench beside a table, forcibly detaining an inn maid with his left arm, and holding a mug of wine in his right hand. Beside him, on the bench, lay a sword, and in

his belt was a pistol. He wore a brown cloth doublet, brown breeches, and green hose.

"A thousand devils!" he roared, as I entered. "Must a fighting man stand and beg for a kiss from a tavern wench? I don't believe in any of your painted saints, wooden or ivory, but I swear by all of them, good-looking girls are made to be hugged, and I was made to hug them! Here, you ten times damned dog of a landlord, bring me another bottle of your filthy wine, or I'll make a hole in your barrel of a body! Be quick, or I'll roast you on your own spit, and burn down your stinking old inn!" At this moment he saw me, as I stood in the doorway. "Come, monsieur!" he cried, "I'm not fastidious, curse me, and you might drink with me if you were the poxy old Pope himself! Here, wench, go and welcome the gentleman with a kiss!" And he shoved the girl towards me and began to pound, in sheer drunken turbulence, on the table with his mug.

I left the kitchen to this noisy guest, and took a room up-stairs, where the landlord presently brought me light and supper.

I paid in advance for my night's lodging, and arranged to have access, at any time during the night, to the shed in which was my horse, so that at the least alarm I might make hasty flight. I opened my window, that the sound of horses on the

road might be audible to me from a distance. Then, having eaten, I put out my light and lay down, in my clothes, ready on occasion to rise and drop from the window, take horse, and be off.

From the kitchen, below, came frequent sounds emitted or caused by the tipsy young Hercules in the brown doublet. Now he bellowed for wine, now he thundered forth profanity, now he filled the place with the noise of Gargantuan laughter; now he sang at the top or the depth of his big, full voice; then could be heard the crash of furniture in collision. These sounds continued until far into the night.

I had intended not to sleep, but to lie with ears alert. I could not yet bring myself to feel that I was safe from pursuit. So used had I become to a condition of flight, that I could not throw off the feeling of being still pursued. And yet, I had hoped that Barbemouche would tire of the chase. My plan had not been to confuse him as to my track, by taking by-roads or skirting the towns, but merely to outrun him. Because I wished to reach Nerac at the earliest possible moment, and because the country was new to me and I desired not to lose my way, I had held to the main road southward, being guided in direction by the sun or the stars. Moreover, had I made detours, or skirted cities, Barbemouche might have gone ahead by the main road and lain in wait

further south for my coming up, for Frolichard, the peasant, had heard me tell the woodman my destination. So, in that first day's flight, I had trusted to the speed of my horse, and now there was some reason to believe that Barbemouche had abandoned pursuit, as the soldiers had done who chased me from Paris. And yet, it seemed to me that this ugly Barbemouche was not one to give up his chosen prey so soon.

Despite my intention, I feel asleep, and when I awoke it was daylight. I sprang up and went cautiously down-stairs, sword in hand. But there was no danger. Only the host and a servant were stirring in the inn. I made a rapid breakfast, and went to see my horse fed. Before the shed, I saw the young man who had made such drunken tumult in the kitchen the previous night. He was just about to mount his horse; but there was now nothing of the roysterer about his look or manner. He had restored neatness to his attire, and his expression was sedate and humble, though strength and sturdiness were as apparent in him as ever.

"A fine morning," I said, as the inn-servant brought out my own horse.

"Yes, monsieur," said the young man, in a very respectful tone. "A sunrise like this is a gift from the good God."

"Yet you look pensive."

"It is because I know how little I deserve such mercy as to live on such a day," answered the man, gravely; and he bowed politely, and rode southward.

This devoutness and humility impressed me as being strangely out of harmony with the profanity and turbulence of the night before, yet the one seemed no less genuine than the other.

My horse fed, I mounted and rode after the sturdy youth.

Not far from Mirebeau, happening to turn my head towards the north, I saw, in the distance, a group of horsemen approaching at a steady gallop. From having looked back at this group many times during the preceding day, I had stamped certain of its figures on my memory, and I now recognized it as Barbemouche and his party.

"Another day of it," I said, to myself, and spurred my horse to a gallop.

An increase in their own pace told me that they in turn had recognized me.

"This grows monotonous," I mused. "If there were only fewer of them, or more of me, I would make a stand."

Presently I came up with the young man in the brown doublet. He stared at me with a look of inquiry as I passed at such speed; then he looked back and saw the distant horsemen coming on at equal speed. He appeared to realize the situation

at a glance. Without a word, he gave his own horse a touch of the spur, with the manifest intention of keeping my company in my flight.

"You have a good horse," I said to him, at the same time watching him out of the corner of my eye, seeking some indication that might show whether, on occasion, he would stand as my friend or my enemy.

"Better than yours, I fear, monsieur," he replied.

"Mine has been hard run," I said, lightly.

Presently he looked back, and said:

"Ah, the devil! Your friends, back there, are sending out an advance guard. Three of them are making a race of it, to see which shall have the honor of first joining you."

I looked back. It was true; three of them were bearing down with great speed, evidently on fresh horses. Barbemouche remained back with the rest.

I urged on my horse.

"It is useless, monsieur," said the young man at my side. "Your beast is no match for theirs. Besides, you will not find a better place to make a stand than the bridge yonder." And he pointed ahead to a bridge that crossed a narrow stream that lay between high banks.

"What, face ten men?" I said.

"There are only three. The thing may be over before the others come up."

I laughed. "Well, admitting that, three against one—" I began.

"Oh, there will be two of us," replied the other.

My heart gave a joyous bound, but I said, "I cannot expect you to risk your life in my quarrel."

And he answered, "By God! I myself have a quarrel with every man that wears on his hat the white cross of the Guises!" His grey eyes flashed, his face became red with wrath. "Let us stop, monsieur."

We stopped and turned our horses on the narrow bridge. We both drew sword and waited. My new-found ally threw back his hat, and I saw across his forehead a deep red scar, which I had not before noticed.

The three men rode up to the attack. They all stopped suddenly before they reached the bridge.

"Give up your sword and come with us, monsieur," cried one of them to me.

I said nothing. "Go to hell!" roared my companion. And with that he charged with the fury of a wild beast, riding between two of the horsemen, and thrusting his sword through the eye and into the brain of one before either could make the least show of defence. His horse coming to a quick stop, he drew his weapon out of the slain man's head and turned on the other. While there was some violent fencing between the two, and while the dead man's

horse reared, and so rid itself of its bleeding burden, the third horseman urged his horse towards me. I turned the point of his rapier, whereupon he immediately backed, and then came for me again just as I charged on him. Each was too quick to meet the other's steel with steel. His sword passed under my right arm and my sword under his right arm, and we found ourselves linked together, arm to arm. I saw him reach with his left hand for his dagger, and I grew sick at the thought that I had no similar weapon with which to make matters even. He plucked the dagger from his belt, and raised it to plunge it into my back; but his wrist was caught in a clutch of iron. My man in the brown doublet, in backing his horse to make another charge on his still remaining opponent, had seen my antagonist's motion, and now, with a twist of his vigorous fingers, caused the dagger to fall from a limp arm. Then my comrade returned to meet his own enemy, and I was again on equal terms with mine. We broke away from each other. I was the quicker to right myself, and a moment later he fell sidewise from his horse, pierced through the right lung.

I backed my horse to the middle of the bridge, and was joined by my stalwart friend, who had done for his second man with a dagger thrust in the side.

"Whew!" he panted, holding his dripping weapons on either side of him, so as not to get any more

blood on his clothes. Then a grin of satisfaction appeared on his perspiring face, and he said :

"Three Guisards less to shout '*Vive la messe.*' It's a pity we haven't time to exchange horses with these dead whelps of hell. But the others are coming up, and we ought to rest awhile."

We sheathed our weapons and spurred on our horses, again southward. Looking back, soon, we saw that the other pursuers, on coming up to their dead comrades, had chosen first to look after the belongings of the latter rather than to avenge their deaths. And while Barbemouche and his men, of whom there were now six, tarried over the dead bodies, we made such good speed that at last we were out of sight of them.

My first use of my returned breath was to thank my stalwart ally.

He received my gratitude with great modesty, said that the Lord had guided his arm in the fight, and expressed himself with a humility that was in complete contrast to the lion-like fury shown by him in the combat. Judging him, from his phrases, to be a Huguenot, I asked whether he was one, by birth, as I was.

"By birth, from my mother," he replied. "My father was a Catholic, and in order to win my mother, he pretended to have joined the reformers. That deceit was the least of his many rascally deeds. He was one of the chosen instruments of the devil, — a

violent, roystering cut-throat, but a good soldier, as was shown in Italy and at St. Quentin, Calais, Jarnac, and elsewhere. My mother, though only the daughter of an armorer's workman, was, in goodness, an angel. I thank God that she sometimes has the upper hand in me, although too often it is my father that prevails in me." He sighed heavily, and looked remorseful.

In subsequent talk, as we rode, I learned that he was a soldier who had learned war, when a boy, under Coligny. He had fought at his father's side against Italians, Spanish, and English, and against his father in civil war. His father had died of a knife-wound, received, not in battle, but from a comrade in a quarrel about a woman, during the sacking of a town. His mother, when the news of the fate of her unworthy spouse reached the village where she lived, died of grief. The son was now returning from that village, which was near Orleans, and whither he had been on a visit to his relations, to Gascony, where he had been employed as a soldier in the small army with which Henri of Navarre made shift to garrison his towns.

I told him that I hoped to find a place in that little army.

"You do well, monsieur," said the young soldier, whose intelligence and native dignity made him, despite his peasant origin, one with whom a gentle-

man might converse. "Some day they will learn in France of what stuff the little Bearnaise King is made. I have stood watching him when he little supposed that a common soldier might take note of such things, and I have seen on his face the sign of great intentions. More goes on under that black hair than people guess at, — he can do more than drink and hunt and make love and jest and swear."

He was in no haste to reach Gascony, he said, and so he intended to visit a former comrade who dwelt in a village some leagues from my road. In the afternoon, coming to the by-road which led to this place, he left me, with the words:

"My name is Blaise Tripault, and should it happen that you ever enroll a company for the King of Navarre — "

"The first name on my list shall be Blaise Tripault," I replied, smiling, and rode on, alone.

Whenever I heard riders behind me, I looked back. At evening I reached an eminence which gave a good view of the country through which I had passed. Two groups of horsemen were visible. One of these consisted of seven men. The chief figure was a burly one which I could not mistake, — that of Barbemouche.

"*Peste!*" I muttered, frowning. "So they are following me into Poitou! Am I never to have any rest?"

I took similar precautions that night to those which I had taken the night before. The next day, about noon, emerging out of a valley, I saw my pursuers on the top of the hill at my rear. Plainly, they intended to follow me to the end of the earth. I hoped they would stop in Poitiers and get drunk, but they tarried there no more than I. And so it was, later, at Civray and at Angoulême.

Every day I got one or two glimpses of this persistent pack of hounds. Every night I used like measures to make sudden flight possible. One night the sound for which I kept my ears expectant reached them, — the sound of horses' hoofs on the hard road. I dropped from the open window of the inn at which I was, led out my horse from the shed, and made off, southward. The noise made by their own horses prevented my pursuers from hearing that made by mine. Presently the clatter abruptly ceased, whereupon I knew that they had stopped at the inn which I had left. My relief at this was offset by chagrin at a discovery made by me at the same moment: I had left my bag of golden crowns in the inn chamber. I dared not now go back for them. Well, Nerac could not be far away, now. I had traversed a good part of Guienne. The Dordogne was behind me.

I was glad that I had taken better care of the letter from Marguerite to her husband than I had

taken of my crowns. Fortunately it had not left my doublet. I felt that my future depended on the delivery of that letter. There could be no doubt that Marguerite had recommended me in it with a favor that would obtain for me both protection and employment from the King of Navarre.

Daylight came, and with it hunger. I stopped at an inn, and was about to dismount, when I remembered that I had no money.

I could do without food for a time, but my horse could not. I told the landlord, — a short, heavy, square-faced, small-eyed man, — that I would, later, send him payment for a breakfast. He looked at me with a contempt that even a peasant dare show to a gentleman, when the gentleman has no money.

"Very well, then," I said. "I will leave you security."

He looked more respectful at this, and made a quick examination of me with his eyes.

"Unless you have some jewelry about you," he said, "your sword is the only thing that I would accept."

"You clod," I exclaimed, in a rage. "I ought to give you my sword through the body."

"A gentleman ought not to demand, for nothing, that which a poor man makes his living by selling," answered the host, turning to go in.

I looked down at my horse, which had already

shown an endurance beyond its stock, and which now turned its eyes, hungrily, towards the inn stable. At the same time I thought I heard the sound of hoofs, away northward. After all, the delivery of the letter depended more on the horse than on my sword, for one horse is more likely to beat seven horses than one sword to beat seven swords.

To try whether it were possible, I made one movement, as if to hand over the weapon. But my arm refused. As well try to pluck the heart out of my body, and give it to the dog's keeping. Rather kill the man on his own threshold and, like a brigand, help myself. But I chose to be merciful.

"Be quick, then," I said. "Bring me some wine, and feed my horse as it stands here. I could take, for nothing, what you ask such high security for."

"And I have three strong sons," said the innkeeper, impudently. But he brought the wine, and ordered one of his sons to bring oats for the horse. So we made our breakfast there, horse and man, standing before the inn door. When the animal had licked up the last grain, I suddenly hurled the heavy wine-mug at the innkeeper's head, wheeled my horse about, and galloped off, shouting back to the half-stunned rascal, "Your three sons must be swift, as well as strong, to take my sword." And I rode on, southward.

"Will the Guisards follow me over this river, also?" I asked myself, as I crossed the Garonne.

In the afternoon, I stopped for another look backward. There was not a soul to be seen on the road.

"Adieu, M. Barbemouche!" I said. "I believe you have grown tired of me at last."

At that instant a group appeared at the distant turn of the road. I counted them. Seven! And they were coming on at the speed of the wind.

I patted my horse on his quivering neck. "Come, old comrade," I said. "Now for one last, long race. In your legs lies my future."

He obeyed the spur, and his increased pace revealed a slight lameness, which had not before been perceptible.

"We have only to reach some Gascon town," I said to him. "The soldiers of the King of Navarre will protect the bearer of a letter to him from their Queen."

I turned in my saddle, and looked back. They were gaining ground.

"They know that this is their last chance," I said. "We are near the country held by the King of Navarre, and so they make a last effort before giving up the chase. On, my staunch fellow! You shall have fine trappings, and shall fare as well as your master, for this!"

The animal maintained its pace as if it understood;

but it panted heavily and foamed, its eyes took on a wild look, and its lameness increased.

"They are coming nearer, there is no doubt of it!" I told myself. "Have I escaped from the Louvre and from Paris, led my enemies a chase through five provinces, to be taken when refuge is at last in sight? Shall Marguerite's letter to Henri of Navarre fall into the hands of those who wish him no good?"

Tears gushed from my eyes as I thought of the cruelty of destiny, which had sustained me so far in order to betray me at the end. I took the letter from my doublet, and held it ready to tear into pieces should I indeed be caught. Although Marguerite was thought to have secrets with the Duke of Guise, it was likely that she would not wish him to know what she might write to her husband, whose political ally she always was.

And now my horse dropped its head lower at each bound forward. The seven horses behind showed no sign of tiring.

"Thank God, I kept my sword! I can kill one of them, at least!"

I no longer looked back. Blindly forward I went, impelled only to defer the end to the last possible moment. God knew what might yet intervene.

Suddenly my horse gave a snort of pain, stumbled blindly, and fell to his knees. He slid forward a short

distance, carried on by his impetus, and then turned over on his side, and lay quivering. I had taken my feet from the stirrups at his stumble, so that I now stood over his body.

I heard the loud clank of the hoofs behind. I stepped over the horse, and drew my sword. A short distance ahead was a clump of scrubby pines; there I would turn and make my stand.

Then was the time when I might have torn up the letter, had I not suddenly forgotten my intention. I held it clutched in my hand, mechanically, as I ran. I was conscious of only one thing, — that death was bearing down on me. The sound of the horses' footfalls filled my ears. Louder and louder came that sound, drowning even the quick panting of my breath. Again came that aching in the side, that intolerable pain which I had felt in my flight from Paris.

I pressed my hand to my side, and plunged forward. Suddenly the road seemed to rise and strike me in the face. I had fallen prostrate, and now lay half-stunned on the earth. I had just time to turn over on my back, that I might face my pursuers, when the foremost horse came up.

"Well, my man," cried the rider, in a quick, nervous voice, as I looked stupidly up at his short, sturdy figure, hooked nose, keen eyes, black hair and beard, and shrewd, good-natured face, "did you think

the devil was after you, that you ran so hard? *Ventre Saint Gris!* You would make an excellent courier."

"I am a courier," I answered, trying to rise. "I ran so fast that I might soon reach Nerac with this letter for your majesty."

And I held the letter out to King Henri of Navarre.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW HE ANNOYED MONSIEUR DE LA CHAT[illegible]

I HAD never seen Henri of Navarre, before, but had often heard him described, and no other man exactly fitted his description. His favorite oath confirmed my recognition.

He took the letter, saying, "It looks as if it had been through fire and flood."

"I had to swim the Seine with it," I said.

He read it, sitting on his horse in the middle of the road, I standing beside the horse, the other six riders eyeing me curiously.

Having finished it, he looked at me with some interest and approval. "And what made you run from us?" he asked.

"Sire, there were seven horsemen left in the party that has been chasing me for some days past. Counting seven in your group, I too quickly assumed that it was the same."

The King of Navarre laughed, and ordered one of the lackeys to give me his horse and proceed afoot to the nearest town. When I was mounted, he asked me to ride beside him.

"The speed at which you rode excited our curiosity," he explained, "and that is why we gave chase."

I learned, later, that Henri and three of his gentlemen, with three valets, had been inspecting the defences of one of his Gascon towns, and were now returning to Nerac. He sometimes traversed those parts of his French provinces where his authority as governor was recognized, without any state, and often without a guard.

In reply to his questions, I said that I preferred a military position to a civil one, but confessed my inexperience. He told me that I might serve as ensign in one of his regiments, at Nerac, until I should acquire some knowledge of military affairs, when he would give me a captain's commission, and I might enlist a company.

I told him of the destruction of my château, and the loss of my money. He thereupon required me to accept the horse on which I rode, and a purse which one of the valets handed over to me. As he then beckoned one of his gentlemen to his side, I fell back. We entered Nerac in the evening. As soon as the gate was passed, the King and his followers turned towards the château, and I took the main street to an inn.

The King of Navarre kept his promises. I had been ensign for only a few months, stationed at

Nerac, when he sent for me, and informed me that he intended to augment his army, and that he would maintain a company of my raising. He caused a captain's commission to be given to me before I left the château. I walked thence, down the avenue of fine trees, which were now in full leaf, before the château, debating with myself the possibility of easily raising a company. When I reached the square before the inn, I heard from within a human roar which had a familiar sound. Entering, I found that it proceeded from the stentorian lungs of Blaise Tripault, the young soldier who had aided my flight to Gascony by killing two Guisards in my defence. He was sitting at a table, very drunk.

"Ah, Blaise Tripault," I cried, "I see that your father prevails in you now!"

He recognized me, threw his bottle of wine out of the open window, and made an attempt at sobriety.

"You have been long on the way to Nerac," I went on, "but you come just in time to keep your promise. I enroll you first in the company which the King has commissioned me to raise."

"I thank you, monsieur," he replied. "I will now go to bed, and will come to you as soon as I am sober."

He was of great use to me in enlisting the company. He scoured the country daily, and brought me recruits. When the roll was complete, I was

ordered to remain at Nerac for a time. Subsequently, I was sent to garrison different towns, one after another, not only in Gascony and parts of Guienne but also in Henri's principality of Béarn and his little kingdom of Navarre.

I am proud to have had a share in the constant efforts made by Henri of Navarre, while the world thought him given over entirely to gallantry at his small but agreeable court, to increase his territory and his resources against the time when he was to strike the great blows that no one yet dreamed he was meditating. Thanks to the unwillingness, or inability, of the King of France to put him in actual possession of his governorship of Guienne, we had the pleasant task, now and then, of wresting some town from the troops of the League or of Henri III. Our Henri had to take by force the places ceded to him by the King of France as Marguerite's dower, but still withheld from him. One of these was Cahors, in the taking of which I fought for days in the streets, always near our Henri, where the heart of the fighting was. It was there that Blaise Tripault covered himself with glory and the blood of the enemy, and was openly praised by the King.

But my life in the south had other pleasures besides those of fighting. As Henri's was a miniature kingdom, so was his court, at cheerful Nerac or

sombre Pau, a miniature court; yet it had its pretty women and gallant gentlemen. Gaiety visited us, too, from the greater world. When the King of France and the Queen-mother thought it to their interest to seem friendly to our Henri, they ordered Marguerite to Nerac. Catherine herself came with her, bringing the Flying Squadron, that Henri and his Huguenots might be seduced into the onesided treaties desired by her. Catherine was one of the few, I think, who foresaw Henri's possible future. Her astrologer, Cosmo Ruggieri, had predicted that he would succeed her three sons to the throne of France, and I suppose she could not endure the thought of this. Better a Guise than a Bourbon, the son of Jeanne d'Albret. But our Henri might be useful to her as an instrument to check the Duke of Guise in any attempted usurpation during the life of her son. Therefore, Henri was to be cajoled while he was being restrained. But he was not fooled into disadvantageous compacts or concessions. All that he lost was a single town, which Catherine caused to be attacked while he was at a fête; but he learned of this at the fête, and retaliated by taking a town of the French King's on the same night.

I was presented to Catherine while she was at Nerac. No allusion was made to the circumstances which had caused my flight from Paris, or, indeed, to my having ever been in Paris. Yet, from her scru-

tiny of my features, I knew that she recalled those circumstances with my name. But Nerac was not the place where it would serve her to concern herself about me. I learned from one of Catherine's gentlemen that Mlle. d'Arency, who had not come with her to Nerac, had wedded the Marquis de Pirillaume, who was jealous and kept her on his estate in Dauphiny, away from the court. I wished him joy of her.

When Catherine and her troop went back to the French court, leaving Marguerite at Nerac, they could boast of a few Huguenot gentlemen won over to their designs, but I was not one of the few. I do not say that I did not amuse myself where charming women abounded, but I kept my heart to myself. I had not resolved to become invulnerable to woman, but I had determined that she by whom I would let myself be wounded should be one vastly unlike any in Catherine's train. When I should find the woman pure as beautiful, incapable of guile, I would love. "Somewhere in France," I often said to myself, "that woman exists. I shall know her when I see her." As in the former affair, I had my ideal already formed, and was already in love, watching for the embodiment of that ideal to appear. But this second ideal was different from the first. And it is time to tell how at last I met her, — and how, for a while, the reality seemed worse even than the first.

The death of the Duke of Anjou, after his reconciliation with the King, his brother, and his failure to win the crown he sought in the Netherlands, was a great event for us in Gascony. It left our Henri of Navarre next in succession to the throne of France. And our Henri was a sturdy man, while Henri III. seemed marked by destiny to follow the three other sons of Catherine to an early grave. It appeared that Marguerite monopolized all the longevity granted to the family. But we knew that the Guises and their League would not let our Huguenot Henri peacefully ascend his throne. Therefore, Henri's policy was to strengthen himself against the time when the death of Henri III. should leave the throne vacant for him. It was his interest also to prevent a usurpation of that throne during the life of Henri III., for such a usurpation would eventually exclude himself also. Thus circumstance made him the natural ally of Henri III. It was, conversely, the interest of the Guises to sow enmity between the two kings. The power of the League in France, and particularly in Paris, was now so great that Henri III. dared not oppose the wishes of the Duke of Guise. He was reduced to devices for gaining time. And so, against his own interest, he sanctioned the war which the League presently demanded against the Huguenots, — a war which might do two things for the Duke of Guise: destroy the next heir

to the throne, and deprive the present King of his chief resource against a usurpation. For the present, the Duke of Guise cloaked his design by having the Pope proclaim the old Cardinal de Bourbon heir to the throne, our Henri being declared ineligible on account of heresy.

In the summer of 1585, the King of France issued anti-Huguenot edicts required by the League. Governors of provinces were ordered to make it uncomfortable for the "heretics." Several of them promptly obeyed, arresting some Huguenots for remaining in their provinces, and arresting others for trying to escape therefrom. By this time, Henri of Navarre had gathered a sufficient army and acquired a sufficient number of towns to hold his own in Guienne, and, indeed, throughout southwestern France. The Prince de Condé also put a Huguenot army in the field. Pending the actual opening of war, which the edicts of Henri III. foreshadowed, our Henri maintained a flying camp in Guienne. Every day recruits came, some of them with stories of persecution to which they had been subjected, some with accounts of difficulty in escaping from their provinces. One day I was summoned to the presence of Henri of Navarre.

"M. de la Tournoire," said he, speaking with his usual briskness and directness, "there are, in most of

the provinces of France, many Huguenots who have publicly recanted, to save their lives and estates. Many of these are secretly for us. They would join me, but they fear to do so lest their estates be confiscated. These are to be assured that what they may lose now by aiding me shall some day be restored to them. Here is a list of a number of such gentlemen in the province of Berry, and you are to give them the assurances necessary to enlist them in our cause. Use what persuasions you can. Take your company, and find some place of concealment among the hills of the southern border of Berry. You can thus provide escort in crossing the border for those who may need it. Where you can in any way aid a Huguenot to escape from the province, where you can rescue one from death or prison, do so, always on condition of promised service in our cause. As for the gentlemen whose names are on this list, have them bring, as contributions, what money and arms they can. We are in even greater need of these than of men. Impress upon these gentlemen that their only hope of ultimate security lies in our triumph. It is a task of danger with which I charge you, monsieur, and I know that you will, therefore, the more gladly undertake it. The governor of Berry, M. de la Chatre, is one of the bulwarks of the League. I learn that he is enforcing the edicts of Henri III.

against the Protestants with the greatest zeal. He is devoted to the Duke of Guise, and is one of our most formidable enemies. It will not, therefore, be well for you to fall into his hands. Go, monsieur, and God be with you!"

I bowed my thanks for the favor of this dangerous mission, and went away with the list in my doublet, proud of having been made the confidant of Henri's resolution to fight for his rights to the end. I was elated, too, at the opportunity to work against the King of France and the Duke of Guise.

To annoy and hamper M. de la Chatre in his work of carrying out the public edicts of the King and the secret designs of the Duke, would give me the keenest joy. For once, both my great enemies, usually so opposed to each other in interest, could be injured at the same time by the same deeds; and such deeds would help my beloved captain, by whom I had been chosen to perform them. I could hardly contain my happiness when I returned to my company, and ordered immediate preparations for a night's march northward.

We set out, myself and Tripault mounted, the others afoot, with several horses bearing provisions and supplies. Marching at night, and concealing ourselves in the forests by day, we at last reached the mountains that form part of the southern boundary of Berry. They were thickly wooded, and though

the month of August made them a series of masses of deep green, they presented a sombre aspect.

"It is somewhere up there," I said, pointing toward the still and frowning hills before us, "that we are to find a burrow, from which to issue forth, now and then, to the plains on the other side."

"The only man in the company who knows this country," replied my devoted squire, Blaise Tripault, "is Frojac, but he makes up for the ignorance of the others by knowing it very well. He can lead us to the most deserted spot among these mountains, where there is an abandoned château, which is said to be under a curse."

"If part of it is under a roof as well, so much the better," I answered. "Bring Frojac to me."

Blaise rode back along the irregular line formed by my rude soldiers, picked out an intelligent looking young arquebusier, and led him forward to me. I made this man, Frojac, our guide.

After toilsome marches, forcing our way up wooded ascents devoid of human habitation, and through almost impenetrable thickets of brushwood, we crossed the highest ridge of the mountain chain, and from a bare spot, a natural clearing, gazed down on the Creuse, which wound along the line formed by the northern base of the mountains. Beyond that lay the province of Berry, which was to be the scene of our operations. Some leagues to

the northeast, crowning a rocky eminence that rose from the left bank of the Creuse, stood a mass of grim-looking towers and high gray walls. From the southern side of this edifice, a small town ran down the declivity to the plain.

"What is that place yonder?" I asked.

"It is the town and château of Clochonne," said Frojac.

"Who occupies the château?"

"It belongs to M. de la Chatre, the governor of the province, who sometimes comes there. A part of it is occupied by a garrison."

We resumed our progress through the forest, now descending the northern slope of the ridge. After some hours, when night was already beginning to fall in the woods, Frojac pointed ahead to a knoll covered with huge trees between whose trunks the space was choked with lesser vegetation.

"There it is," he said. "The Château de Maury."

We made our way through the thicket, and came suddenly upon ruined walls, rising in the midst of trees. Wild growths of various kinds filled up what had been the courtyard, and invaded the very doors. The broken walls and cracked towers themselves seemed as much a part of nature as the trees and bushes were. Branches thrust themselves through apertures in the crumbling stone. Southward from the foot of the knoll rose the mountains, eastward

and westward extended an undulating natural platform that interrupted the descent of the mountain side. Northward the ground fell in a steep precipice to the left bank of the Creuse, along which ran a little-used road from Clochonne, which was northeast, to Narjec, which was southwest.

"Is there a path down the slope, by which we could reach that road, should we wish to go north by way of Clochonne?" I asked.

"I do not think so," replied Frojac. "But there used to be a road from here to Clochonne, through the forest. It has not been used since the Sieur de Maury left, twenty years ago, to hunt for gold in the new world. They said that, before going, he made a compact with the devil, here, by which Satan was to lead him to a land of gold across the sea. The devil is believed to be taking care of his estate until he returns. Perhaps this road has not been entirely wiped out by the forest."

A part of the château was yet under roof. This portion included the hall and three or four chambers above it. On the day after our arrival, we found the road through the forest still sufficiently open to serve us for expeditious egress. This abandoned way did not itself go to Clochonne, but it ran into a road that went from that town southward across the mountain. At the point of junction was the abode of an old woodman and his wife, where the couple maintained

a kind of inn for the entertainment of people crossing the mountain. This man, Godeau, was rheumatic, bent, thin, timid, shrill-voiced, and under the domination of his large, robust, strong-lunged spouse, Marianne. By means of a little flattery, a gold piece, promises of patronage, and hints of dire vengeance upon any who might betray me, I secured this woman's complete devotion. These two were the only human dwellers within two leagues of our chosen hiding-place.

In Guienne, my master considered as enemies those who did not acknowledge his authority, and he provisioned his army at their expense. Inasmuch as the province of Berry was making war on our party, I treated it as hostile country, subject to pillage, according to the customs of war. It is true, some of its people were friendly to our cause, but it was as much their duty to contribute to our maintenance, since we were fighting in their behalf, as it was our right to take from those to whom our relation was one of warfare. So I gave my men permission to forage, putting but one condition upon them, — that of losing their lives rather than allow our hiding-place to be disclosed. Thus, by virtue of many nightly visits to farms in the vicinity of Clochonne and Narjec, we contrived to avoid the pangs of an empty stomach.

Having established my company on a living basis

at Maury, I began with relish the work of annoying M. de la Chatre. I sent out certain of my men, severally, to different parts of southern Berry as seekers of information. In the guise of peasants, or of soldiers going to serve in the army which the Governor, La Chatre, was then augmenting, they learned much that was valuable to me. It is written, under the title of "How the Lord Protected His Own and Chastised His Enemies in Berry," in the book called "The Manifold Mercies of God to His Children," by the pastor Laudrec, who has reported rightly what I related to him: how we made recruits for Henri of Navarre by finding out Huguenots in towns and villages and convincing them that they were sure to be arrested should they remain in Berry; how we guided these out of the province by various ways of our own discovery, across the mountain; how we interrupted the hanging of several men at Issoudun, who had been condemned for heresy and treason, and sent them in safety to Guienne; how certain of my men, without my authority, despoiled Catholic churches of their instruments of idolatry, and thus helped to replenish the treasury of our master; how I once marched my company by night to a wood near Bourges, lay in wait there until a guard came, conducting captured Huguenots for trial, attacked the guard, rescued the prisoners, and protected them in a hurried flight to the border,

whence they proceeded to swell the army of our Henri; and how we served our cause in numerous other exploits, which I need not relate here, as you may read them in Laudrec's book, printed in Geneva.

The many secret departures of Huguenots from southern Berry, despite the vigilance of the garrisons at Clochonne and other frontier strongholds, must naturally have attracted the attention of the authorities, and so must the sudden public appearances that I made with my company on occasions like that at Issoudun and that near Bourges. My men, who moved, unknown, among the people, began to hear reports of a mysterious captain who hid in the southern hills and sallied forth at night to spirit Huguenots away. To this mysterious captain and his band were attributed not only all the exploits that we did accomplish, but many that we did not; and some daring robberies, of which we were innocent, were laid to our charge.

Finally, in September, I had evidence that our deeds had begun to make an impression on M. de la Chatre, the illustrious governor of the province and of the Orléannais as well. One of my men, Roquelin, saw in the market-place of Chateauroux an offer of five hundred crowns for the capture of this unknown rebel captain, which document was signed by La Chatre. I here saw an opportunity to make myself known in high places as one capable of harm-

ing and defying his enemies, despite their greatness. I was rejoiced at the hope of acquainting the Duke of Guise and the King of France with the fact that I had survived to work defiantly against their cause, under the very nose of one of their most redoubtable servants. I had not been of sufficient consequence for the Duke to fear, or for the King to protect, but now I was of sufficient consequence, as their enemy, for a price to be put on my head. So I sent one of my clever fellows, Sabray, to fasten by night beside La Chatre's placard in Chateauroux, a proclamation of my own, in which I offered ten crowns for the head of M. de la Chatre, and twenty crowns for that of his master, the Duke of Guise. I appended this signature: "The Sieur de la Tournoire, who does not forget." I knew that some of La Chatre's enemies would take great pleasure in making this known to the Duke of Guise, and that the latter would reproach the King with my continued existence. It irritates the great to be defied by the small, and to irritate these two great ones was my delight.

I soon learned, with glee, that my return of compliments had reached the knowledge of the governor. Maugert brought me word of a notice posted in Clochonne, in which La Chatre doubled his offer and termed me the "heretic, rebel, traitor, and robber calling himself Sieur de la Tournoire."

While I gave myself the pleasure of annoying M.

de la Chatre, I did not neglect the more important service imposed on me by Henri of Navarre. Accompanied only by Blaise Tripault, and travelling by night, I visited, one after another, the gentlemen named on my master's list, and used what eloquence I had, pointing out the expediency of assuring future security by making present sacrifices for our cause. Many of them required very little persuasion. On hearing that Henri of Navarre had given his word to defend his succession with his sword, they nobly left their estates and went to join his army, carrying with them what money and arms they could take. Thanks to the guidance of my men, they eluded the garrisons on the border.

It was in early October, when the forests were turning yellow, brown, and red, and the fallen leaves began to lie in the roads, that I started out with Blaise Tripault to visit the gentleman named last on the list.

"Monsieur," said Blaise, as we neared the end of our hidden forest road and were approaching the inn of Godeau, "I have in me a kind of feeling that this, being our last excursion, is likely to be the most dangerous. It would doubtless please Fortune to play us an ugly trick after having served us so well hitherto."

"Nonsense!" I replied.

"I believe that is what the famous Bussy d'Am-

boise said when he was warned not to keep his appointment with Mme. de Monsoreau," returned Blaise; "yet he was, none the less, killed by the rascals that lay in ambush with her husband."

"Thanks to the most kingly King of France, Henri III., who advised M. de Monsoreau to force his wife to make the fatal appointment with Bussy. Thanks, also, to the truly grateful Duke of Anjou, who rewarded Bussy for his faithful service by concurring in the plot for his assassination."

"The Duke was worse than the King, for the King has been loyal to his chosen favorites. Think of the monument he erected in honor of De Quelus, and the others who got their deaths in that great duel in the horse-market. *Par dieu!* I should like to have seen those girl-men of the King and those Guisards killing one another!"

"I have observed, Blaise, that you take an extraordinary pleasure in the slaughter of Guisards."

"I was in Coligny's house, monsieur, on the night of the St. Bartholomew. I was one of those who, at the Admiral's command, fled to the roof, and from the roof of the next house I saw Coligny's body thrown into his courtyard, and the Duke of Guise turn it over with his foot and wipe the blood from the face to see if it were indeed my old captain's. Since then, the sight of the white cross of Guise stirs in me all the hell that my diabolical

father transmitted to me. And I should not like to see you fall into the hands of this Chatre, who is the right arm of the Duke of Guise in Berry. That is why I give heed to the premonition that troubles me regarding this journey."

"Certainly we cannot abandon the journey."

"No, but we can take unusual precautions, monsieur. Reports of our doings are everywhere. Has it never occurred to you that you are, in appearance, exactly the sort of man who would be taken for our leader? Ought you not to disguise yourself?"

"An excellent idea, Blaise! I shall put on your clothes, and you shall put on mine, — I shall pass as your lackey. It will be quite amusing."

"That is not the disguise I should have suggested," said Blaise, looking not too well pleased with the idea. "It would require me to pass as a gentleman."

But I saw possibilities of fun in the thing, and welcomed any means of enlivening our excursion. Therefore, we dismounted at Godeau's inn, and made the exchange of attire, much against the liking of Blaise, who now repented of having advised any disguise at all. My clothes were a little too tight for Blaise, for I was of medium size, and he puffed and turned red in the face, and presented a curious appearance of fierceness and discomfort. When I looked at him, I could not help laughing, and he met my glance with a grim and reproachful countenance.

I did not think that his brown doublet and breeches and brown felt hat and feather were much disguise for me. As we rode along, I diverted myself by trying to assume a servile mien, which did not easily fit my rather bold face, prominent nose, keen gray eyes, up-curling brown mustache and pointed brown beard. With his curly reddish hair and beard, defiant mustache, honest, big, blue eyes, swelling red cheeks, and robust body, Blaise looked like one who must have had his dignities thrust upon him very recently.

We reached, without accident, our destination,— the château of the Baron d'Equinay, — and that gentleman was speedily won by the assurances that I bore him from Henri of Navarre. He desired, before starting for Guienne, to go to Paris, where he had resources, and he rode off northward at the same moment when we departed southward to return to Maury.

"It is well!" I cried to Blaise, as we rode in the bracing air of the October morning. "We have carried our King's message to every one of his chosen adherents in Berry. We ride through the province of M. de la Chatre, breathe his fresh air, absorb his sunshine as freely as he does himself. You see how reliable were your premonitions when we last set out from Maury."

"It is not too late yet, monsieur," growled Blaise, whose temper was ill while he wore my clothes; "we are not yet back at Maury."

"You will talk less dismally over a bottle of good wine, Blaise. Therefore, I intend to stop at the first inn on the way. I hope it is a good one, for I am very hungry."

"There is an inn at this end of Fleurier," said Blaise, "but I would not stop if I were you."

But I was not to be moved from my intention. When a man has finished a set task, it is time to eat and drink. Therefore, we stopped at the little inn at the northern edge of Fleurier. A gray, bent innkeeper, very desirous of pleasing, welcomed us and went to look after our horses, while Blaise, acting the part of master, ordered a black-eyed, pretty inn-maid to serve us dinner in a private chamber. The room assigned us was at the head of a stairway leading from the kitchen. We had no sooner seated ourselves than our ears were assailed by the clatter of many horses on the road outside. They stopped before the inn, and we heard the voices of two men who entered the kitchen, and of a great number who remained without. When the inn-maid brought us a bottle of wine, Blaise asked her whose cavalcade it was that waited before the inn.

"It is that of the governor of the province, M. de la Chatre," said she, "who is below with his secretary, M. de Montignac."

And she left the room in haste to help serve so distinguished a guest.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SWEET LADY IN DISTRESS.

BLAISE looked at me solemnly, with a face that seemed to say, "Did I not warn you?" We had seated ourselves at either side of a small, rough table, I on the edge of the bed, Blaise on a three-legged stool. For a moment I sat returning Blaise's gaze across the table; then noticing that the maid had left the door of our chamber slightly ajar, I arose and walked stealthily to the crack, through which I could see a part of the kitchen below. Blaise remained seated at the table, glumly watching me.

I saw the maid bearing wine to a table near the window, where sat the two guests whose names she had mentioned. The landlord was carrying a tray full of bottles and drinking-cups out to La Chatre's men, who remained before the inn, some having dismounted, some still on horse. I could hear their talk, their oaths and cries to one another and to their horses, the snorts and pawings of their steeds. A shout of welcome greeted the coming of the landlord with the wine.

With curiosity I fastened my gaze on the two at the table. I knew instantly that the stout, erect, authoritative gentleman with the carefully trimmed gray beard, full cheeks, proud brow, fearless eyes, and soldierly air, must be Claude de la Chatre, governor of the Orléannais and Berri; and that the slender, delicately formed, sinuous, graceful youth with smooth-shaven face, fine sharply cut features, intelligent forehead, reddish hair, intent gray eyes, and mien of pretended humility, was the governor's secretary, Montignac. La Chatre's look was frank, open, brave. Montignac had the face of a man assuming a character, and awaiting his opportunity, concealing his ambition and his pride, suppressing the scorn that strove to disclose itself at the corners of his womanish mouth. La Chatre wore a rich black velvet doublet and breeches, and black leather riding-boots. Montignac was dressed, in accordance with his pretence of servility, in a doublet of olive-colored cloth, breeches of the same material, and buff boots. He sat entirely motionless, looking across the table at his master with an almost imperceptibly mocking air of profound attention.

Monsieur de la Chatre appeared to be in a bad humor. He gulped down his wine hastily, seeming not to taste it. With a frown of irritation he drew from his belt a letter, of which the seal was already broken. Opening it with quick, angry motions,

he held it before him, and frowned the more deeply.

"*Peste!*" he exclaimed, when the maid had left the kitchen; and then he went on in a rich, virile, energetic voice: "To be met on the road by such a letter! When I saw the courier in the distance I felt that he was bound for me, and that he brought annoyance with him. The duke has never before used such a tone to me. If he were on the ground, and knew the trouble these dogs of heretics give me, he would doubtless change his manner of speech."

"Monseigneur the Duke of Guise certainly wrote in haste, and therefore his expressions have an abruptness that he did not intend," replied Montignac, in a low, discreet, deferential voice, whose very tone was attuned to the policy of subtle flattery which he employed towards his master. "And he acknowledges, as well, your many successes as he complains of your failure to catch this Sieur de la Tournoire."

So the letter by which the governor was so irritated came from the Duke of Guise, and concerned myself! My work in Berri had not been in vain. Instinctively I grasped the hilt of my sword, and at the same time I smiled to myself to think how La Chatre might have felt had he known that, while himself and his secretary were the only persons in the inn kitchen, the Sieur de la Tournoire saw and

heard them from the crack of the slightly open door at the top of the stairway. To make myself safer from discovery, I now took my eye from the crack, keeping my ear sufficiently near to catch the words of my enemies. I glanced at Blaise, who had heard enough to acquaint him with the situation, and whose open-eyed face had taken on an expression of alertness and amazement comical to behold. He, too, had mechanically clutched the handle of his sword. Neither of us moving or speaking, we both listened. But the governor's next words were drowned by the noise that came from outside, as the landlord opened the front door to reënter the inn. La Chatre's men, now supplied with wine, had taken up a song with whose words and tune we were well acquainted.

"Hang every heretic high,
Where the crows and pigeons pass!
Let the brood of Calvin die;
Long live the mass!
A plague on the Huguenots, ah!
Let the cry of battle ring:
Huguenots, Huguenots, Huguenots, ah!
Long live the king!"

The singers uttered the word "Huguenots," and the exclamation "ah," with an expression of loathing and scorn which could have been equalled only by the look of defiance and hate that suddenly alighted on the face of Blaise. He gave a deep gulp, as if

forcing back, for safety, some answering cry that rose from his breast and sought exit. Then he ground his teeth, and through closed lips emitted from his throat a low growl, precisely like that of a pugnacious dog held in restraint.

The landlord closed the door, and the song of La Chatre's men sank into a rudely melodious murmur. The host then went out by a rear door, and the governor resumed the conversation.

"*Corbœuf!* He is a fox, this Tournoire, who makes his excursions by night, and who cannot be tracked to his burrow."

"We know, at least," put in the secretary, in his mild way, "that his burrow is somewhere in the wooded mountains at the southern border of the province."

"Then he knows those mountains better than the garrisons do," said La Chatre. "The troops from the southern towns have hunted the hills in vain."

"When such a task as the capture of this rebel is entrusted to many, it is not undertaken with zeal. The chance of success, the burden of responsibility, the blame of failure, are alike felt to be divided."

This observation on the part of the youthful secretary seemed to be regarded by the governor as presumptuous. It elicited from him a frown of reproof. His look became cold and haughty. Whereupon Montignac gently added:

"As you, monsieur, remarked the other day."

La Chatre's expression immediately softened.

"The governor's brains are in the head of the secretary," thought I; "and their place in his own head is taken by vanity."

"I remember," returned La Chatre. "And I added, did I not, that — ahem, that —"

"That the finding of this Huguenot nuisance ought to be made the particular duty of one chosen person, who should have all to gain by success, or, better still, all to lose by failure."

And the suave secretary looked at his master with an expression of secret contempt and amusement, although the innocent governor doubtless saw only the respect and solicitude which the young man counterfeited.

"You are right," said the governor, with unconcealed satisfaction. "I ought to reward you for reminding me. But your reward shall come, Montignac. The coming war will give me the opportunity to serve both the King and the Duke of Guise most effectually, and by whatever favor I gain, my faithful secretary shall benefit."

"My benefit will be due to your generosity, not to my poor merit, monsieur," replied Montignac, with an irony too delicate for the perception of the noble governor.

"Oh, you have merit, Montignac," said La Chatre,

with lofty condescension. Then he glanced at the letter, and his face clouded. "But meanwhile," he added, in obedience to a childish necessity of communicating his troubles, "my favor depends, even for its continuance in its present degree, on the speedy capture of this Tournoire. The rascal appears to have obtained the special animosity of the Duke by some previous act. Moreover, he is an enemy to the King, also a deserter from the French Guards, so that he deserves death on various accounts, old and new."

Herein I saw exemplified the inability of the great to forget or forgive any who may have eluded their power.

"Let me, therefore," continued the governor, "consider as to what person shall be chosen for the task of bagging this wary game."

And he was silent, seeming to be considering in his mind, but really, I thought, waiting for the useful Montignac to suggest some one.

"It need not be a person of great skill," said Montignac, "if it be one who has a strong motive for accomplishing the service with success. For, indeed, the work is easy. The chosen person," he went on, as if taking pleasure in showing the rapidity and ingenuity of his own thoughts, "has but to go to the southern border, pretending to be a Huguenot trying to escape the penalties of the new edicts. In

one way or another, by moving among the lower classes, this supposed fugitive will find out real Huguenots, of whom there are undoubtedly some still left at Clochonne and other towns near the mountains. Several circumstances have shown that this Tournoire has made himself, or his agents, accessible to Huguenots, for these escapes of heretics across the border began at the same time when his rescues of Huguenot prisoners began. Without doubt, any pretended Protestant, apparently seeking guidance to Guienne, would, in associating with the Huguenots along the Creuse, come across one who could direct him to this Tournoire."

"But what then?" said the governor, his eagerness making him forget his pretence of being wiser than his secretary. "To find him is not to make him prisoner, — for the Duke desires him to be taken alive. He probably has a large following of rascals as daring and clever as himself."

"Knowing his hiding-place, you would send a larger body of troops against him."

"But," interposed the governor, really glad to have found a weak point in the plan suggested by his secretary, "in order to acquaint me with his hiding-place, if he has a permanent hiding-place, my spy would have to leave him. This would excite his suspicions, and he would change his hiding-place. Or, indeed, he may be entirely migratory, and have

no fixed place of camping. Or, having one, he might change it, for any reason, before my troops could reach it. Doubtless, his followers patrol the hills, and could give him ample warning in case of attack."

"Your spy," said Montignac, who had availed himself of the governor's interruption to empty a mug of wine, "would have to find means of doing two things, — the first to make an appointment with La Tournoire, which would take him from his men; the second, to inform you of that appointment in time for you to lead or send a company of soldiers to surprise La Tournoire at the appointed place."

"*Par dieu*, Montignac!" cried the governor, with a laugh of derision. "Drink less wine, I pray you! Your scheme becomes preposterous. Of what kind of man do you take him to be, this Sieur de la Tournoire, who offers a reward, in my own province, for my head and that of the Duke of Guise?"

"The scheme, monsieur," said Montignac, quietly, not disclosing to the governor the slightest resentment at the latter's ridicule, "is quite practicable. This is the manner in which it can be best conducted. Your chosen spy must be provided with two messengers, with whom he may have communication as circumstances may allow. When the spy shall have met La Tournoire, and learned his hiding-place, if he have a permanent one, one messenger shall bring the information to you at Bourges, that

you may go to Clochonne to be near at hand for the final step. Having sent the first messenger, the spy shall fall ill, so as to have apparent reason for not going on to Guienne. On learning of your arrival at Clochonne, — an event of which La Tournoire is sure to be informed, — your spy shall make the appointment of which I spoke, and shall send the second messenger to you at Clochonne with word of that appointment, so that your troops can be at hand."

"The project is full of absurdities, Montignac," said the governor, shaking his head.

"Enumerate them, monsieur," said Montignac, without change of tone or countenance.

"First, the lesser one. Why impede the spy with the necessity of communicating with more than one messenger?"

"Because the spy may succeed in learning the enemy's hiding-place, if there be one, and yet fail in the rest of the design. To learn his hiding-place is at least something worth gaining, though the project accomplish nothing more. Moreover, the arrival of the first messenger will inform you that the spy is on the ground and has won La Tournoire's confidence, and that it is time for you to go to Clochonne. The appointment must not be made until you are near at hand, for great exactness must be observed as to time and place, so that you can surely surprise him while he is away from his men."

"Montignac, I begin to despair of you," said the governor, with a look of commiseration. "How do you suppose that La Tournoire could be induced to make such an appointment? What pretext could be invented for requesting such a meeting? In what business could he be interested that would require a secret interview at a distance from his followers?"

I thought the governor's questions quite natural, and was waiting in much curiosity for the answer of Montignac, of whose perspicacity I was now beginning to lose my high opinion, when the inn-maid entered the kitchen, and the secretary repressed the reply already on his lips. She took from the spit a fowl that had been roasting, and brought it to our chamber. To avoid exciting her suspicions I had to leave my place of observation and reseat myself on the bed.

Having placed the fowl, hot and juicy, on the table between us, the maid went away, again leaving the door partly open. Blaise promptly attacked the fowl, but I returned to my post of outlook.

"Lack of zeal?" I heard the governor say. "*Pardieu*, where have I let a known Huguenot rest in peace in my provinces since the edicts have been proclaimed? And I have even made Catholics suffer for showing a disposition to shield heretics. There was that gentleman of this very town —"

"M. de Varion," put in Montignac.

"Ay, M. de Varion, — a good Catholic. Yet I caused his arrest because he hid his old friend, that Polignart, who had turned heretic. *Mon dieu*, what can I do more? I punish not only heretics, but also those who shield heretics. Yet the Duke of Guise hints that I lack zeal!"

"As to M. de Varion," said Montignac; "what is your intention regarding him?"

"To make an example of him, that hereafter no Catholic will dare shelter a Huguenot on the score of old friendship. Let him remain a prisoner in the château of Fleurier until the judges, whom I will instruct, shall find him guilty of treason. Then his body shall hang at the château gate for the nourishment of the crows."

"Fortunately," said Montignac listlessly, "he has no family to give trouble afterward."

"No son," replied the governor. "Did not M. de Brissard say that there was a daughter?"

"Yes, an unmarried daughter who was visiting some bourgeois relation in Bourges at the time of her father's arrest."

"When she learns of her father's incarceration she will probably pester me with supplications for his release. See to it, Montignac, that this Mlle. de Varion be not suffered to approach me."

My eavesdropping was again interrupted by the

return of the inn-maid. On going out of the chamber this time, she closed the door. Hunger and prudence, together, overcoming my curiosity, I did not open it, but joined Blaise in disposing of the dinner. The table at which we ate was near the window of the chamber, and we could look out on the grassy space of land before the inn. La Chatre's men were moving about, looking to their horses and harness, talking in little groups, and watching for their master's appearance at the inn door.

Presently four new figures came into view, all mounted. From our window we could see them plainly as they approached the inn. One of these newcomers was a young lady who wore a mask. At her side rode a maid, slim, youthful, and fresh-looking. Behind these were two serving boys, one tall, large, and strong; the other small and agile.

"By the blue heaven!" Blaise blurted out; "a dainty piece of womankind!"

"Silence, Blaise!" I said, reprovingly. "How dare you speak with such liberty of a lady?"

"I thought I was supposed to be masquerading as a gentleman," he growled. "But it was not of the lady that I spoke. It was the maid."

The lady had the slender figure of a woman of twenty. Over a tight-fitting gown of blue cloth, she wore a cloak of brown velvet, which was open at the front. Fine, wavy brown hair was visible

beneath her large brown velvet hat. She wore brown gloves and carried a riding whip. As for her face, her black mask concealed the upper part, but there were disclosed a delicate red mouth and a finely cut chin. The throat was white and full.

The maid was smaller than the mistress. She had a pretty face, rather bold blue eyes, an impudent little mouth, an expression of self-confidence and challenge.

La Chatre's men made room for this little cavalcade to pass to the inn. The maid looked at them disdainfully, but the lady glanced neither to right nor left. Having ridden up close to the inn, they dismounted and entered, thus passing out of our sight.

I would fain have again looked down into the kitchen, now that these attractive guests had arrived to disturb the governor's confidential talk, but the inn-maid had closed our chamber door tight, and I might have attracted the governor's attention by opening it. Moreover, I could not long cherish the idea of watching, unobserved, the movements of a lady. So, for some time, Blaise and I confined our attention to the dinner, Blaise frequently casting a glance at the door as if he would have liked to go down-stairs and make a closer inspection of the pretty face of the maid.

Several times we heard voices, now that of a lady, now that of the governor, as if the two were conversing together, but the words spoken were not distinguishable. It did not please me to think that the lady might have come hither to join the governor.

At last the noise of La Chatre's men remounting told us that the governor had rejoined them from the inn. Looking out of the window, we saw him at their head, a splendid, commanding figure. Montignac, studious-looking, despite the horse beneath him, was beside the governor. I noticed that the secretary sat a horse as well as any of the soldiers did. I observed, too, and with pleasure, that the lady was not with them; therefore, she was still in the inn. I was glad to infer that her acquaintance with La Chatre was but casual, and that her meeting with him at the inn had been by chance.

The governor jerked his rein, and the troop moved off, northward, bound I knew not whither, the weapons and harness shining in the sunlight. I turned to Blaise with a smile of triumph.

"And now what of your croakings?" I asked. "As if the safest place in all France for us was not within sound of M. de la Chatre's voice, where he would never suppose us to be! It did not even occur to him to ask what guests were in the upper chamber! What would he have given to know that La Tour-

noire sat drinking under the same roof with him? Instead of coming to disaster, we have heard his plans, and are thus put on our guard. More of your evil forebodings, my amiable Blaise! They mean good."

But Blaise looked none the less gloomy. "There is yet time for evil to come of this journey, my captain," he said gravely.

I now made haste to finish my meal, that I might go down into the kitchen ere the lady in the brown robe should depart.

Presently, Blaise, glancing out of the window, exclaimed, "The devil! "We are not yet rid of our friends! There is one of them, at least!"

I looked out and saw two mounted gentlemen, one of whom was Montignac, the governor's secretary, who had ridden back. The other, with whom he was talking in low tones, and with an air of authority, was a man of my own age, dressed in the shabby remains of rich clothes. His face showed the marks of dissipation, and had a cynical, daredevil look. Now and then a sarcastic smile broke suddenly over the handsome and once noble features.

"I have seen that man, somewhere, before," said I to Blaise.

While I stood searching my memory, and the man sat talking to Montignac, both having stopped their horses in front of the inn, there tramped up, from

the South, four other travellers, all of a kind very commonly seen on the highways, in those days of frequent war. They were ragged soldiers of fortune, out at elbows, red of cheek and nose, all having the same look of brow-beating defiance, ready to turn, in a moment, into abject servility. The foremost of these was a big burly fellow with a black beard, and a fierce scowl.

As he came up towards the gentleman with whom Montignac was talking, there suddenly came on me a sense of having once, in the dim past, been in strangely similar circumstances to those in which I was now. Once, long ago, had I not looked out in danger from a place of concealment upon a meeting of those two men before an inn?

The burly rascal saluted the mounted gentleman, saying, in a coarse, strident voice:

"At your service, M. le Vicomte de Berquin."

"Know your place, Barbemouche!" was the quick reply. "I am talking with a gentleman."

Then I remembered the morning after my flight from Paris, seven years before. Montignac's reckless-looking companion had been the gay gentleman going north, at whom I had looked from an inn shed. The other was the man who had afterwards chased me southward at the behest of the Duke of Guise. But he no longer wore on his hat the white cross of Lorraine, and the Vicomte de Berquin's apparel was

no longer gay and spotless. The two had doubtless fallen on hard ways. Both showed the marks of reverses and hard drinking. Barbemouche's sword was, manifestly, no longer in the pay of the Duke of Guise, but was ready to serve the first bidder.

Barbemouche shrugged his shoulders at De Berquin's reproof, and led his three sorry-looking companions to a bench in front of the inn, where they searched their pockets for coin before venturing to cross the threshold.

Monsignac now pointed to the inn, spoke a few last earnest words to Berquin, handed the latter a few gold pieces, cast at him a threatening look at parting, and galloped off to rejoin M. de la Chatre, whose cavalcade was now out of our sight. De Berquin gave him an ironical bow, kissed the gold pieces before pocketing them, dismounted, and entered the inn, replying only with a laugh to the supplicating looks of the moneyless Barbemouche and his hungry-looking comrades on the bench.

"Now I wonder what in the devil's name the governor's secretary was saying to that man?" growled Blaise Tripault.

For reply, I gave a look which reflected the surmise that I saw in Blaise's own eyes.

"Well," I said, "if it be that, the Vicomte de Berquin will be a vastly ingenious gentleman if he can either find our hiding-place, or delude me away

from my men. To think that they should have chosen the first mercenary wretch they met on their way! Yet doubtless the perspicacious Montignac knows his man."

"The secretary pointed to this inn as if he were telling him that you were here," observed Blaise, meditatively.

"But inasmuch as the secretary does not know that I am here," said I, "his pointing to the inn could not have accompanied that information. He was doubtless advising his friend to begin his enterprise with a hearty meal, which was very good advice. And now, as this Vicomte de Berquin does not know me by sight, let us go down and make his acquaintance. Remember that you are the master, and make a better pretence of it than you have usually made."

"I pretend the master no worse than you pretend the servant," muttered Blaise, while I opened the door of our chamber. A moment later we were descending the stairs leading to the kitchen.

An unexpected sight met our eyes. M. de Berquin stood with his back to a rear door, his arms extended, as if to prevent the departure of the lady, who stood facing him, in the attitude of shrinking back from him. She still wore her mask. Beside her stood her maid, who darted looks of indignation

at the smiling De Berquin. These three were the only ones in the kitchen.

"I do not know you, monsieur!" the lady was saying, in a low voice of great beauty.

"Death of my life! But you shall know me, mademoiselle," replied De Berquin, who had not noticed the entrance of myself and Blaise; "for I intend to guard you from harm on the rest of your journey, whether you will or not!"

Blaise shot at me a glance of interrogation. To keep up our assumed characters, it was for him, not me, to interfere in behalf of this lady; yet he dared not act without secret direction from me. But I forgot our pretence and hastened forward, my hand on my sword-hilt.

"I fear monsieur is annoying mademoiselle," I said, gently, assuming that De Berquin had been correct in addressing her as mademoiselle.

Startled at the voice of a newcomer, the three turned and looked at me in surprise. Blaise, at a loss as to what he ought to do, remained in the background.

"But," I added, "monsieur will not do so again for the present."

De Berquin took me in at a glance, and, deceived by my dress, said carelessly, "Go to the devil!" Then, turning from me to Blaise, as one turns from an inferior to an equal, he remarked:

"You have a most impudent servant, monsieur!"

Blaise, embarrassed by the situation, and conscious that the curious eyes of the lady and the maid were upon him, could only shrug his shoulders in reply. The maid, whom he had so much admired, turned to her mistress with a look of astonishment at his seeming indifference. Seeing this, Blaise became very red in the face.

It was I who answered De Berquin, and with the words:

"And your servant, if you have one, has a most impudent master."

De Berquin turned pale with rage at the insulting allusion to his somewhat indigent appearance.

"Your master shall answer for your impertinence!" he cried, drawing his sword and making for Blaise.

In an instant my own sword was out, and I was barring his way.

"Let *us* argue the matter, monsieur!" said I.

"*Peste!*" he hissed. "I fight not lackeys!"

"You will fight *me*," I said, "or leave the presence of this lady at once!"

Impelled by uncontrollable wrath, he thrust at me furiously. With a timely twist, I sent his sword flying from his hand to the door. I motioned him to follow it.

Completely astonished, he obeyed my gesture,

"'LET US ARGUE THE MATTER, MONSIEUR!'"

went and picked up his sword, opened the door, and then turned to Blaise and spoke these words, in a voice that trembled with rage:

"Monsieur, since you let your menial handle your sword for you, I cannot hope for satisfaction. But though I am no great prophet, I can predict that both you and your cur shall yet feel the foot of *my* lackey on your necks. And, mademoiselle," he added, removing his look to the lady, "this is not the end of it with you!"

With which parting threats, he strode out of the inn, closing the door after him.

Blaise, deprived by his false position of the power of speech, stood with frowning brow and puffed-out cheeks, nervously clutching at his sword-hilt. The lady and her maid looked at him with curiosity, as if a gentleman who would stand idly and speechlessly by, while his servant resented an insult to a lady, was a strange being, to be viewed with wonder.

"Mademoiselle," said I, laying my sword on a table, "heaven is kind to me in having led me where I might have the joy of serving you."

The lady, whose musical voice had the sound of sadness in it, answered with the graciousness warranted by the occasion:

"My good man, your sword lifts you above your degree, even," and here she glanced at Blaise, and continued in a tone of irrepressible contempt, "as

the tameness of some gentlemen lowers them beneath theirs."

Blaise, from whose nature tameness was the attribute farthest removed, looked first at the lady, in helpless bewilderment, then at me, with mute reproach for having placed him in his ridiculous position, and lastly at the maid, who regarded him with open derision. To be laughed at by this piquant creature, to whose charms he had been so speedily susceptible, was the crowning misery. His expression of woe was such that I could not easily retain my own serious and respectful countenance.

Having to make some answer to the lady, I said:

"An opportunity to defend so fair a lady would elevate the most ignoble."

The lady, not being accustomed to exchanging compliments with a man-servant, went to her maid and talked with her in whispers, the two both gazing at Blaise with expressions of mirth.

Blaise strode to my side with an awkwardness quite new to him. His face was in a violent perspiration.

"The devil!" he whispered. "How they laugh at me! Won't you explain?"

"Impossible!"

"I object to being taken for a calf," said Blaise, ready to burst with anger. Then, suddenly reaching

the limit of his endurance, he faced the lady and blurted out:

"Mademoiselle, I would have run your pursuer through quickly enough, but I dared not rob my master —"

I coughed a warning against his betraying us. He hesitated, then despairingly added, in a voice of resignation:

"— my master, the King, of a single stroke of this sword, which I have devoted entirely to his service."

"I do not doubt," said the lady, with cold irony, "that your sword is active enough when drawn in the service of your King."

"My King," replied Blaise with dignity, "had the goodness to make a somewhat similar remark when he took Cahors!"

"Cahors?" repeated the lady in a tone of perplexity. "But the King never took Cahors!"

"The King of France, — no!" cried Blaise; "but the King of Navarre did!"

"Blaise!" I cried, in angry reproof at his imprudence.

The tone in which I spoke had so startled the lady that she dropped her mask, and I saw the sweetest face that ever gladdened the eyes of a man. It was the face of a girl naturally of a cheerful nature, but newly made acquainted with sorrow.

Grief had not rendered the nature, or the face, unresponsive to transient impressions of a pleasant or mirthful kind. Hers was one of those hearts in which grief does not exclude all possibility of gaiety. Sorrow might lie at the bottom, never forgotten and never entirely concealed, but merriment might ripple on the surface. As for its outlines, the face, in every part, harmonized with the grace and purity of the chin and mouth. Her eyes were blue and large, with an eloquence displayed without intent or consciousness.

"What does it mean?" she said, in a charming bewilderment. "The servant reproves the master. Ah! I see! The servant *is* the master."

And she smiled with pleasure at her discovery.

"But still *your* servant, mademoiselle," was all that I could say.

Blaise vented a great breath of relief. "I feel better now," he said, heartily, and he turned with a beaming countenance to the maid, who looked at his stalwart form and promptly revised her opinion of him. The two were soon in conversation together, at the fireplace, and I was left to complete explanations with the lady, who did not attempt the coquetry of replacing her mask.

"Our secret is yours, mademoiselle, and our safety is in your hands."

"Your secret is safe, monsieur," she said, mod-

estly averting her eyes from my frankly admiring look. "And now I understand why it was you who drew sword."

"A privilege too precious to be resigned," I answered in a low tone, "even for the sake of my secret and my safety."

My words were spoken so tenderly that she sought relief from her charming embarrassment by taking up my sword from the table, and saying, with a smile:

"I have you in my power, monsieur, follower of the King of Navarre! What if I were minded, on behalf of the governor of this province, to make you a prisoner?"

"My faith!" I could only reply, "you need no sword to make prisoners of men."

"You hope to purchase your freedom with a compliment," she said, continuing the jest; "but you cannot close my eyes with flattery."

"It would be a crime beyond me to close eyes so beautiful!"

She gave a pretty little smile and shrug of helplessness, as if to say, "I cannot help it, monsieur, if you will overwhelm me with compliments which are not deserved, I am powerless to prevent you." But the compliments were all the more deserved because she seemed to think them not so.

Her modesty weakened my own audacity, and her innocent eyes put me into a kind of confusion. So I changed the subject.

"It appears to me, mademoiselle," I said, "that I have had the honor of ridding you of unpleasant company."

Her face quickly clouded, as if my words had brought to her mind a greater trouble than the mere importunities of an insolent adventurer.

"De Berquin!" she said, and then heaved a deep sigh; "I had forgotten about him."

"I would not commit his offence of thrusting unwelcome company on you," I replied; "but I would gladly offer you for a few leagues the sword that has already put him to flight."

She was for some time silent. Then she answered slowly in a low voice, "I ride towards Clochonne, monsieur."

Taking this for an acceptance of my offer, I sheathed my sword, and replied with an animation that betrayed my pleasure:

"And I towards the same place, mademoiselle. When you choose to set out, I am ready."

"I am ready now, monsieur —," she said, lingering over the word "monsieur," as if trying to recall whether or not I had told her my name.

It was no time at which to disclose the title under which I was known throughout the province as one

especially proscribed, and yet I was unwilling to pass under a false name. Therefore, I said:

"I am M. de Launay, once of Anjou, but now of nowhere in particular. The great have caused my château to be scattered over my lands, stone by stone, and have otherwise encouraged my taste for travel and adventure."

At this moment, glancing towards Blaise, I saw on his face a look of alarm and disapproval, as if he feared that the lady or her maid might be aware that De Launay and La Tournoire were one man, but it was manifest from their faces that he had no cause for such an apprehension.

The lady smiled at my description, and adjusting her gloves, replied:

"And I am Mlle. de Varion, daughter of a gentleman of Fleurier —"

"What!" I interrupted, "the Catholic gentleman who has been imprisoned for sheltering a Huguenot?"

"Yes," she answered, sorrowfully, and then with a strange trepidation she went on: "and it is to save myself from imprisonment that I have determined to flee to the south, in the hope of finding refuge in one of the provinces controlled by your King of Navarre."

"But," I interposed, "how can you be in danger of imprisonment? It was not you, but your father, who violated the edict."

"Nevertheless," she answered, in a low and unsteady voice, averting her glance to the floor, "M. de la Chatre, the governor of the province, has threatened me with imprisonment if I remain in Berry."

"Doubtless," I said with indignation, "the governor does this in order to escape the importunities you would make in your father's behalf. He would save his tender heart from the pain of being touched by your pleadings."

"It may be so," she answered faintly.

I did not tell her that the idea of releasing her father had already entered my head. In order to bring him safe out of the Château of Fleurier, it would be necessary for me to return to Maury for my company. The attempt would be a hazardous one, and I might fail, and I did not wish to raise hopes in her for disappointment. She should not learn of my intention until after its fulfillment. In the meantime, less because I thought she would really undergo danger by remaining at Fleurier, than because I was loth to lose the new-found happiness that her presence gave me, I would conduct her to Maury, on the pretext of its being the best place whence to make, at a convenient time, a safe flight to Guienne.

Having summoned the landlord and paid him, I waited for Mlle. de Varion to precede me out of the

door. There was a moment's delay while her maid sought the riding whip which mademoiselle had laid down on one of the tables. At this moment, there came to me the idea of a jest which would furnish me with amusement on the road southward, and afford mademoiselle an interesting surprise on her arrival at Maury.

"It occurs to me, mademoiselle," said I, "that you will be glad to have some guidance across the border. Let me recommend to you one, whose services I think I can assure you, and whom we may fall in with in the vicinity of Clochonne, — the Sieur de la Tournoire."

Mademoiselle turned white, and stared at me with a look of terror on her face.

"Decidedly," I thought, "as the mere mention of my name produces such an effect on her, it is well that I am not going to introduce myself until she shall have learned that I am not such a terrible cut-throat as the Catholics in this province think me." And I said aloud:

"Fear not, mademoiselle. He is not as bad as his enemies represent him."

"I shall be glad to have his guidance," she said, still pale.

We left the inn and took horse, being joined, outside, by mademoiselle's two serving-boys. Resuming his character of gentleman, Blaise rode ahead with

the lady, while I followed at the side of the maid, he casting many an envious glance at the place I occupied, and I reciprocating his feelings if not his looks. Nevertheless, I was sufficiently near mademoiselle to be able to exchange speeches with her. The day was at its best. The sun shone; a gentle breeze played with the red and yellow leaves in the roadway, and I was happy.

Looking down a byway as we passed, I saw, at some distance, M. de Berquin talking to Barbemouche, while the latter's three scurvy-looking companions stood by, as if awaiting the outcome of the conversation between the two.

"Oho, M. de Berquin!" I said to myself, with an inward laugh; "I do not know whether you are bargaining for help to persecute Mlle. de Varion, or to spy on the Sieur de la Tournoire; but it has come to pass that you can do both at the same time."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FOUR RASCALS.

We rode southward at an easy pace, that mademoiselle might not be made to suffer from fatigue. Aside from the desirability of our reaching safe territory, there was no reason for great haste. M. de Varion had not yet been tried, and the attempt to deliver him from prison need not be made immediately. Time would be required in which I might form a satisfactory plan of action in this matter. It would be necessary to employ all my men in it, and to bring them secretly from Maury by night marches, but I must not take the first step until the whole design should be complete in my mind.

I suggested to mademoiselle that we first go to her father's house, in Fleurier, where she might get such of her belongings as she wished to take with her. But she desired to take no more along than was already in the portmanteaus that her boys, Hugo and Pierre, carried with them on their horses. She had come directly from Bourges with this baggage, having been visiting an unmarried aunt, in

that city, when news of her father's arrest reached her.

When I questioned her as to her conduct on the reception of that news, her face clouded, and she showed embarrassment and a wish to avoid the subject. Nevertheless, she gave me answers, and I finally learned that her purpose on leaving Bourges had been to seek the governor of the province, immediately, and petition for her father's release. It was by accident that she had met M. de la Chatre at the inn, where she had stopped that her horses might be baited. My persistent, though deferential, inquiries elicited from her, in a wavering voice, that she had not previously possessed the governor's acquaintance; that her entreaties had evoked only the governor's wrathful orders to depart from the province on pain of sharing her father's fate; and that La Chatre had refused to allow her even to see her father in his dungeon in the Château of Fleurier.

Her agitation as she disclosed these things to me became so great that I presently desisted from pursuing the subject, and sought to restore brightness to the face of one whose tenderness and youth made her misfortune ineffably touching.

I found that, with a woman's intelligence, she had a child's ingenuousness. I had no difficulty in leading her to talk about herself. Artlessly she communicated to me the salient facts of her life. Her

father, the younger son of a noble family, had passed his days in study on his little portion of land near Fleurier. Like myself, she had when very young become motherless. As for her education, her unmarried aunt had taught her those accomplishments which a woman can best impart, while her father had instructed her concerning the ancients, the arts, and the sciences. She had been to Paris but once, and knew nothing of the court.

Most of my conversation with mademoiselle was had while we traversed a deserted stretch of road, where I could, with safety, ride by her side and allow Blaise to take my place with the maid, Jeannotte. I could infer how deeply the good fellow had been smitten with the petite damsel by the means which he took to impress her in return. Far from showing himself as the wounded, sighing lover, he swelled to large dimensions, assumed his most martial frown, and carried himself as a most formidable personage. He boasted sonorously of his achievements in battle.

"And the scar on your forehead," I heard her say, as she inspected his visage with a coquettish side glance; "at what battle did you get that?"

His reply was uttered in a voice whose rancorous fierceness must have set the maid trembling.

"In the battle of the Rue Etienne," he said, "which was fought between myself and a hell-born Papist, on St. Bartholomew's night, in 1572.

From the next house-roof, I had seen Coligny's body thrown, bleeding, from his own window into his courtyard, for I was one of those who were with him when his murderers came, and whom he ordered to flee. I ran from roof to roof, hoping to reach a house where a number of Huguenots were, that I might lead them back to avenge the admiral's murder. I dropped to the street and ran around a corner straight into the arms of one of the butchers employed by the Duke of Guise that night to decorate the streets of Paris with the best blood in France. Seeing that I did not wear the white cross on my arm, he was good enough to give me this red mark on my forehead. But in those days I was quick at repartee, and I gave him a similar mark on a similar place. Then I was knocked down from behind, and when I awoke it was the next day. The dogs had thought me dead. As for the man who gave me this mark, I have not seen him since, but for thirteen years I have prayed hard to the bountiful Father in Heaven to bring us together again some day, and the good God in His infinite kindness will surely do so!"

Now and then mademoiselle turned in her saddle to look behind. It was when she did this for the ninth or tenth time that she gave a start, and her lips parted with a half-uttered ejaculation of alarm. I followed her look and saw five mounted figures far

behind us, on the road. It was most probable that these were De Berquin, Barbemouche, and the latter's three ragged comrades. But in this sight I found no reason to be disturbed. If mademoiselle was the object of De Berquin's quest, I felt that our party was sufficiently strong to protect her. If he had abandoned the intention of annoying her with further importunities, and was merely proceeding to Clochonne in order to act as the governor's spy against me, there could be no immediate danger in his presence, for he did not suspect that I was the Sieur de la Tournoire.

"Be assured, mademoiselle," I said, "you have nothing whatever to fear from M. de Berquin."

"I do not fear for myself," she replied, with a pathetic little smile. "It cannot be possible that, having seen me only once, he should put himself to so much trouble merely to inflict his attentions on me."

"Then you never saw him before the meeting at the inn to-day?" I asked, in surprise.

"Never. When he addressed me and introduced himself, I was surprised that he should already know my name."

I then recalled that the governor's secretary, Montignac, at one time, during his talk with De Berquin outside our window, had pointed towards the inn. Was it, then, of Mlle. de Varion that he

had been talking? Montignac, of course, having witnessed the interview between mademoiselle and the governor, had learned her name. It must have been he who had communicated it to De Berquin. Had the subtle secretary entrusted the unscrupulous cavalier with some commission relative to mademoiselle, as well as with the task of betraying me? It was in vain that I tried to find satisfactory answers to these questions.

I asked mademoiselle whether she had ever known Montignac before this day.

"Never," she answered, with a kind of shudder, which seemed to express both abhorrence and fear. Again she grew reticent; again the shadow and the look of confusion appeared on her face. I could make nothing of these signs. To attempt a solution by interrogating her was only to cause her pain, and rather than do that I preferred to remain mystified.

Once more mademoiselle cast an uneasy look at the riders in the distance rearward.

"Ah!" said I, with a smile, "you have no fear for yourself, yet you continue to look back with an expression that very nearly resembles that of fright."

"I do not fear for myself," she said, quite artlessly; "it is for you that I fear. M. de Berquin will surely try to revenge himself for the humiliation you gave him."

A joyous thrill sent the blood to my cheeks.

Without disguising my feelings, I turned and looked at her. Doubtless the gladness that shone in my eyes told her what was in my heart. Realizing that her frank and gentle demonstration of solicitude was a confession to be received with ineffable delight by the man to whom it was tendered, she dropped her eyes and a deep blush overspread her face. For some time no word passed between us; enough had been said. I knew that the look in my eyes had told more, a thousand times, than all the extravagant compliments with which I had, half banteringly, deluged her at the inn.

We might, by hard riding, have reached Maury on the night of that day, but mademoiselle's comfort was to be considered, and, moreover, I desired to throw De Berquin off our track before going to our hiding-place. Therefore, when Clochonne was yet some leagues before us, we turned into a by-way, and stopped at an obscure inn at the end of a small village. This hostelry was a mere hut, consisting of a kitchen and one other apartment, and was kept by an old couple as stupid and avaricious as any of their class. The whole place, such as it was, was at our disposal. The one private room was given over to mademoiselle and Jeannotte for the night, it being decided that I and Blaise should share the kitchen with the inn-keeper and his wife, while the two boys should sleep in an outer shed with the horses.

Roused from sluggishness by the sight of a gold piece, which Blaise displayed, the old couple succeeded in getting for us a passable supper, which we had served to us on the end of an old wine-butt outside the inn, as the kitchen was intolerably smoky.

"A poor place, mademoiselle," said I, ashamed of having conducted so delicate a creature to this miserable hovel.

"What would you have?" she replied, with a pretty attempt to cover her dejection by a show of cheerfulness. "One cannot flee, for one's liberty, through the forest, and live in a château at the same time.

As for the others, hunger and fatigue made any fare and shelter welcome. Blaise, in particular, found the wine acceptable. Conscious of the glances of Jeannotte, now flashing, now demure, he strove to outdo himself in one of his happiest accomplishments, that of drinking. The two boys, Hugo and Pierre, emulated his achievements, and only the presence of mademoiselle deterred our party from becoming a noisy one.

Blaise became more and more exuberant as he made the wine flow the more generously. Seeing a way of diverting mademoiselle from her sad thoughts, I set him to telling of the things he had done in battle when controlled by the sangui-

nary spirit of his father. He had a manner of narrating these deeds of slaughter, which took all the horror out of them, and made them rather comical than of any other description. He soon had mademoiselle smiling, the maid laughing, and the two boys looking on him with open-eyed admiration. Finding Jeannotte and the boys so well entertained, mademoiselle allowed them to remain with Blaise when she retired to her room.

I followed her to the inn door, and bade her rest without fear, assuring her that I would die ere the least harm should befall her.

"Nay," she answered smiling, "I would endure much harm rather than buy security at such a price."

For an instant her smooth and delicate fingers lay in mine. Then they were swiftly withdrawn, and she passed in, while I stood outside to muse, in the gathering dusk, upon the great change that had come over the world since my first meeting with her, six hours before. The very stars and sky seemed to smile upon me; the moonlight seemed to shine for me consciously with a greater softness; the very smell of the earth and grass and trees had grown sweeter to me. I thought how barren, though I had not known it, the world had been before this transformation, and how unendurable to me would be a return of that barrenness.

I rejoined the now somewhat boisterous party at the wine-butt in time to catch Blaise making an attempt to kiss Jeannotte, who was maintaining a fair pretence of resistance. She seemed rather displeased at my return, for as Blaise, unabashedly, continued his efforts, she was compelled, in order to make her coyness seem real to me, to break from him, and flee into the inn.

Blaise, in whom the spirit of his father was now manifestly gaining the ascendancy, consoled himself for the absence of Jeannotte by drinking more heroically and betaking to song. The boys labored assiduously to keep him company. Finally the stalwart fellow, Hugo, succumbed to the effects of the wine, and staggered off to the shed. Pierre followed him a few minutes later, and Blaise was left alone with the remains of the wine. The landlord and his wife had retired to rest, on their pallets on the kitchen floor, some time before. Blaise sat on a log, singing to himself and cursing imaginary enemies, until all the wine at hand was exhausted. Then he let me lead him into the kitchen, where he immediately dropped to the floor, rolled over on his back, and began snoring with the vigor that characterized all his vocal manifestations.

Making a pillow of my cloak, I lay down beside him, and tried to sleep; but the stale air of the kitchen, the new thoughts to which my mind clung

with delight, the puzzling questions that sought to displace those thoughts, and the tremendous snoring of both the landlord and his wife, as well as of Blaise, made slumber impossible to me. I therefore rose, and went out of the inn. At a short distance away was a smooth, grassy knoll, now bathed in moonlight. I decided to make this my couch. I had proceeded only a few steps from the inn when the silence of the early night was disturbed by the sound of footsteps on the crisp, fallen leaves in the woods close at hand.

The smallness of the village and the obscurity of the locality gave importance to every sound, proceeding from a human source, at this hour. I, therefore, dropped behind the thick stump of a tree, where I might see and hear without being observed. Presently a figure emerged from the edge of the wood and moved cautiously towards the inn. It stopped, made a gesture towards the wood, and then continued its course. Three more figures then came out of the wood, one very tall, one exceedingly broad, and the third extremely thin. They came on with great caution, and finally joined the first comer near the inn. By this time I had recognized the leader as my old friend, Barbemouche. The others were his companions.

I awaited their further proceedings with curiosity. Was it in quest of us, at the behest of De Berquin,

that they had come hither so cautiously and without their horses? Very probably. Doubtless, from afar, they had seen us turn into the byway which, as one or more of them perhaps knew, led to this inn and to no other. It was not likely that, having certainly made some bargain with De Berquin, and being moneyless, they had quitted his service so soon. Yet, if they were now carrying out orders of his against mademoiselle or against me, the supposed lackey who had incurred his wrath, why was he not with them? I hoped soon to see these questions answered by the doings of the rascals themselves.

The fat ruffian sank down, with a heavy sigh of relief, on the log where Blaise had sat. He pulled down with him the thin fellow, who had been clutching his arm as if for support. The latter had a wavy, yellow beard, a feminine manner, and a dandified air, as if he might once have been a fop at the court before descending to the rags which now covered him. The fat hireling had a face on which both good nature and pugnacity were depicted. At present he was puffing from his exertions afoot. The most striking figure of the group was that of the tall rascal. He was gaunt, angular and erect, throwing out his chest, and wearing a solemn and meditative mien upon his weather-beaten face. This visage, long enough in its frame-work, was further extended by a great, pointed beard. There was

something of grandeur about this cadaverous, frowning, Spanish-looking wreck of a warrior, as he stood thoughtfully leaning upon a huge two-handed sword, which he had doubtless obtained in the pillage of some old armory.

"The place seems closed as tight as the gates of Heaven to a heretic," growled Barbemouche, scrutinizing the inn.

The tall fellow here awoke from his reverie, and spoke in solemn, deliberate tones:

"Would it not be well to wake up the landlord and try his wine?"

"Wake up the devil!" cried Barbemouche angrily. "Nobody is to be waked up. We are simply to find out whether they are here, and then go back to the Captain. Your unquenchable thirst will take you to hell before your time, François."

"It is astonishing," put in the fat fellow, looking at the tall, lean François, "how so few gallons of body can hold so many gallons of wine."

"Would I had your body to fill with wine, Antoine," said François, longingly; and then, casting an unhappy look at the inn, he added, "and the wine to fill it with."

"What are you shaking for, Jacques?" asked fat Antoine of his slim comrade at his side. "One would think you were afraid. Haven't you told us that love of fighting was the one passion of your life?"

"Death of the devil, so it is!" replied Jacques in a soft voice, and with a lisp worthy of one of the King's painted minions. "That is what annoys me, for if this insignificant matter should come to a fight, and I should accidentally be killed in so obscure an affair, how could I ever again indulge my passion for fighting?"

Meanwhile, Barbemouche had gone to the door and cautiously opened it, no one having barred it after my departure from the kitchen. I could hear the sound of Blaise's superb snoring, mingled with the less resonant efforts of the old couple. Barbemouche surveyed as much of the kitchen as the moonlight disclosed to him. Then he quietly shut the door and turned to his fellows.

"It is well," he said. "The gentleman himself is snoring his lungs away just inside the door. There is another room, and it is there that the women must be. The others are probably in the shed. Let us go quietly, as it would not be polite to disturb their sleep."

Whereupon Barbemouche led the way back to the woods, followed by fat Antoine, who toiled puffingly, Jacques, who stepped daintily and seemed fearful of treading on stones and briars, and last of all François, who moved at a measured pace, with long strides, retaining his air of profound meditation. The sound of the crushing of leaves beneath their

feet became more distant, and finally died out entirely.

In vain I asked myself the meaning of this strange investigation. Manifestly the present object of De Berquin was nothing more than to keep himself informed of our whereabouts. But why had he sent all four of his henchmen to find out whether we were at this inn, when one would have sufficed? I abandoned the attempt to deduce what his exact intentions were. Drowsiness now coming over me, and the night air having grown colder, I repaired to the shed for the purpose of obtaining there the repose that had been denied me in the kitchen. I was satisfied in mind that whatever blow De Berquin intended to strike for the possession of mademoiselle, or for revenge upon myself, would be attempted at a time and place more convenient to him. Knowing that my slumbers invariably yielded to any unusual noise, I allowed myself to fall asleep on a pile of straw in the shed.

I know not how long I had slept, when I suddenly awoke with a start and sat upright. What noise had invaded my sleep, I could not, at that moment, tell. The place was then perfectly quiet, save for the regular breathing of the two boys, and an occasional movement of one of the horses. The shed was still entirely dark, excepting where a thin slice of moonlight entered at a crack. I sat still, listening.

Presently a low sound struck my ear, something between a growl and a groan. I quickly arose, left the shed, and ran to a clump of bushes at the side of the inn, whence the sound proceeded. Separating the bushes I saw, lying prone on the ground among them, the stalwart body of Blaise.

"What is the matter?" I cried. "Speak! Are you wounded?"

The only reply was a kind of muffled roar. Looking closer, I saw that Blaise's mouth and head were tightly bound by the detached sleeve of a doublet, and this had deterred him from articulating. I saw, also, that his legs had been tied together, and his hands fastened behind him with a rope.

I rapidly released his legs, and he stood up. Then I undid his hands, and he stretched out his arms with relief. Finally I unbound his mouth and he spoke:

"Oh, the whelps of hell! To fall on a man when he is sleeping off his wine, and tie him up like a trussed fowl! I will have the blood of every cursed knave of them! And the maid! Grandmother of the devil! They have taken the maid! Come, monsieur, let us cut them into pieces, and save the maid!"

But I held him back, and cried: "And mademoiselle, what of her? Speak, you drunken dog! Have you let her be harmed?"

"She is perfectly safe," he answered, in his turn holding me back from rushing to the inn. "I do not think that she was even awakened. What use to let her know what has happened? If we rescue the maid and the maid will hold her tongue, mademoiselle will never know what danger she has escaped."

"Or what vigilant protectors she has had to guard her sleep," I said, with bitter self-reproach, no longer daring to blame Blaise for a laxity of which I had been equally guilty. "You are right," I went on, "she must know nothing. Now tell me at once exactly what has occurred."

Blaise would rather have looked for his sword, and started off immediately to the rescue of the maid, but I made him stand with me in the shadow of the inn and relate.

"From the time when I fell asleep on the kitchen floor," he said, "I knew nothing until a little while ago, when I awoke, and found myself still where I had lain down, but tied up as you found me yonder. Four curs of hell were lifting me to carry me out. I tried to strike, but the deep sleep, induced by that cursed wine, had allowed them to tie me up as neatly as if I had been a dead deer. Neither could I speak, though I tried hard enough to curse, you may be sure. So they brought me out, and laid me down there by the inn-door. 'Would it not be

best to stick a sword into him?' said one of the rascals, a soft speaking, womanish pup. A hungry-looking giant put the point of an old two-handed sword at my breast, as if to carry out the suggestion; but a heavy, black-bearded scoundrel, whose voice I think I have heard before, pushed the sword away and said: 'No, the captain has a quarrel to adjust with him in person. We are to concern ourselves entirely with the lady. Lay him yonder.' So they carried me over to the bushes. 'And now for the others,' said the giant. 'Why lose time over them?' said the burly fellow, who seemed to be the leader; 'they are sleeping like pigs in the shed. Come! We can do the business without waking them up.'

"So they left me lying on the ground and went into the inn again, very quietly. They must have gone, without waking the landlord or his wife, into the room of mademoiselle and her maid. Presently they came out again, carrying the maid. When they had gone about half way to the woods, they stopped and set her on her feet. So far, I suppose, it was the wine that kept her asleep; but now she awoke, and I could see her looking around, very scared, from one to the other of the four rascals. Then she gave a scream. At that instant, there came rushing from the woods, with his sword drawn, your friend, the Vicomte de Berquin. 'Stand off, rascals!' he shouted, as he ran up to them. They drew their weapons, and

made a weak pretense of resisting him; then, when each one had exchanged a thrust with him, they all turned tail, and made off into the woods.

"M. de Berquin now turned to the maid, who had fallen to her knees in fright. Taking her hand, he said, 'Mademoiselle, I thank Heaven I arrived in time to give you the aid your own escort failed to afford. Perhaps now you will be the less unwilling to accept my protection!'—the maid now looked up at him, and he got a good view of her face. He started back as if hell had opened before him, threw her hand from his, turned towards the woods, and shouted to the four rascals, 'You whelps of the devil, you have made a mistake and brought the maid!' He was about to follow them, when it probably occurred to him that if left free the maid would disclose his little project; for he stood thinking a moment, then grasped the frightened maid by the wrist, and ran off into the woods, dragging her after him. All this I saw through an opening in the bushes while I lay helpless and speechless. By industriously working my jaw, I at last succeeded in making my mouth sufficiently free to produce the sounds which brought you to me. Now, monsieur, let us hasten after the maid, for mademoiselle will be vastly annoyed to lose her precious Jeannotte."

I saw that Blaise knew with what argument I was quickest to be moved.

"Blaise," I said, "do not pretend that it is only for mademoiselle's sake that you are concerned. In your anxiety about the maid, you forget the danger in which mademoiselle still lies, and which requires me to remain here. When the ingenious De Berquin learns, from his four henchmen, that mademoiselle was not awakened, he will certainly repeat his attempt. He thinks to win her favor by appearing to be her rescuer from these four pretended assailants, and, at the same time, to make us seem unworthy to protect her. He does not know that she has seen the four rascals in his company. He wishes to work with his own hand his revenge upon us, and so he has let us live. I see the way to make him so ridiculous in the eyes of mademoiselle that he will never dare show his face to her again."

"But the maid!" persisted Blaise.

"They will doubtless secure her somewhere in the woods, and return here to enact, with mademoiselle herself, the sham rescue which they mistakenly carried out with the maid. Go and seek your precious Jeannotte, if you please, but do not let them discover you. Wait until they leave her before you try to release her."

Blaise was quick to avail himself of this conditional commission. He went with me into the kitchen, where the old couple were sleeping as noisily as ever, and found his sword where he had laid it before

supper. The door to mademoiselle's room was ajar. Standing at the threshold, I could hear her breathing peacefully, unaware of the peril from which, by a blunder, she had been saved. Through the small window of the room came a bar of moonlight which lighted up her face. It was a face pale, sad, innocent, — the face of a girl transformed, in an instant, to womanhood by a single grief.

Leaving her door as I had found it, I went from the inn to the shed, still wearing my sword, which I had put on in first leaving the kitchen after my futile attempt to sleep. Blaise was already making rapidly for the woods.

I quietly awoke Hugo and Pierre, and bade them put on their weapons and remain ready to respond to my call. I then posted myself again behind the tree stump near the inn door and awaited occurrences.

By this time clouds had arisen, and the moonlight was frequently obscured. I had waited about half an hour, when, again, the sound of breaking leaves and sticks warned me that living beings were approaching through the woods. At last I made out the four figures of De Berquin's hirelings as they cautiously paused at the edge of the open space. Apparently assured by the silence that their presence was unsuspected, they came on to the inn. In a moment of moonlight, I perceived, also, the

figure of De Berquin, who stood at the border of the woods watching the proceedings of his varlets. Even as I looked, he withdrew into the shadow. At the same time a heavy mass of cloud cast darkness over the place.

But I could descry the black forms of the four rascals huddled together at the door of the inn, which the foremost cautiously opened. A moment later they had all entered the kitchen.

I glided rapidly through the darkness after them, and took my stand just within the door, where any one attempting to pass out must encounter me. The four rascals were now at the inner door leading to the room of mademoiselle.

"Stand off, rascals!" I cried, assuming the tone of De Berquin. In the same moment, I gently punctured the back of the nearest rascal with my sword.

Surprised at what they took for the premature advent of their master, the fellows turned and stood for a moment undecided. But, by thrusting my sword among them, I enabled them to make up their minds. They could but blindly obey their instructions, and so they came towards me with a feeble pretense of attack. In the darkness it was impossible for them to make out my features. I met their sham assault with much greater vigor than De Berquin had led them to expect from him. This they might have been moved to resist, in earnest,

but for the fear of losing their pay, which De Berquin, in order to secure himself against treachery on their part, would certainly have represented as being, not on his person, but somewhere awaiting his call. Thus deterred from making a sufficient defence against my sword-play, and as mademoiselle, awakened by the noise, had hastened to her door and was looking on, the four adventurers soon considered that their pretense of battle had lasted long enough. A howl of pain from Barbemouche, evoked by a wound in the groin, was the signal for their general flight. As I still stood in the doorway to bar all exit there, they sought other ways of egress. The slim Jacques ran past mademoiselle into her room and bolted through the window. Barbemouche managed to go through the rear window of the kitchen, and the fat Antoine tried to follow him, but succeeded only as to his head, arms, and shoulders. Squeezed tightly into the opening, he remained an irresistible temptation to the point of my sword, and at every thrust he beat the air with his legs, and shrieked piteously. The tall François, in attempting to reach this window at one stride, had stumbled against the bodies of the terrified innkeeper and his wife, and he now labored, vainly, to release his leg from the grasp of the old woman, who clung to it with the strength of desperation.

I took mademoiselle by the hand and led her out

into the air. Here we were joined by Hugo and Pierre, who had run around from the shed at the noise. I was just about to answer her look of bewilderment and inquiry, when there came a loud cry:

"Stand off, rascals!"

And on rushed De Berquin from the woods, making a great flourish with his sword as he came. In the darkness, seeing mademoiselle standing with three men, one of whom had led her rapidly from the inn, the inventive Vicomte had taken us three for his own zealous henchmen.

And so he came, like some giant-slaying chevalier of the old days, crying again: "Stand off, rascals!" and adding, "You hounds, release this lady!"

"Fear not for the lady; her friends are here!" I said, motioning Hugo and Pierre aside and stepping forward with mademoiselle, my drawn sword in my right hand.

The moon reappeared, and showed De Berquin standing with open mouth, as if turned to stone. In a moment this astonishment passed.

"Thousand devils!" he cried. "The cursed lackey!"

And he made a wrathful thrust at me, but I disarmed him now as neatly as at the inn. Thereupon, he picked up his sword and made rapidly off to the woods. Turning towards the inn, I saw the tall

fellow and his fat comrade leaving it, the former bearing his huge sword on his shoulder. They avoided us by a detour, and followed De Berquin. The two who had escaped by windows had, doubtless, already reached the protection of the trees. I began to explain to mademoiselle, and was asking myself how best to account for the absence of Jeannotte, when I saw Blaise coming from the woods, bearing the maid in his arms. To prevent her from returning to the inn, De Berquin had caused Barbemouche to bind her to a tree. When her captors had departed to make a second attempt against mademoiselle, the maid had set up a moaning, and this had guided Blaise to her side.

It was now impossible to conceal any of the night's events from mademoiselle, but she, far from blaming our lack of vigilance, feigned to think herself indebted to us for a second rescue from the attentions of her persecutor. During the rest of that night her slumbers were more faithfully guarded, although they were not threatened again.

CHAPTER X.

A DISAPPEARANCE.

THE next morning we resumed our way southward. The weather was clear and fine, yet Mlle. de Varion seemed more heavy at heart than she had been on the preceding day. This could not be attributed to any apprehension of further annoyance from De Berquin, for, as her talk showed, she believed that he would not again trouble her after his having cut so poor a figure with his attempt at an intended rescue. But though I did not tell her, I had good reason to believe that we were not yet done with him. The failure of his attempt with regard to mademoiselle, whether or not that attempt had been dictated by Montignac, would not make him abandon the more important mission concerning the Sieur de la Tournoire. Therefore, I was likely to encounter him again, and probably nearer Maury, and, as it was my intention that mademoiselle should remain under my protection until after my venture in behalf of her father, it was probable that she, too, would see more of her erstwhile pursuer. I would

allow events to dictate precautions against the discovery of my hiding-place by De Berquin, against his interference with my intended attempt to deliver M. de Varion, and against his molesting Mlle. de Varion during my absence from her on that attempt. I might have killed De Berquin when I disarmed him on the previous night, but I did not wish to make him, in the least, an object of mademoiselle's pity, and, moreover, I was curious to see what means he would adopt towards hunting me down and betraying me.

Not only the dejection of Mlle. de Varion made our ride a melancholy one, despite the radiance of the autumn morning. Blaise, repentant of his over-indulgence, and still feeling the humiliation of the easy capture made of him by four scurvy knaves, had taken refuge in one of those moods of pious reflection which he attributed to maternal influence. Piqued at this reticence, the maid, Jeannotte, maintained a sulky silence. The two boys, devoted to their mistress, now faithfully reflected her sad and uneasy demeanor.

"Look, mademoiselle!" said I, glad of having found objects toward which to draw her attention, "yonder is the Château of Clochonne. Beyond that, and to the right, are the mountains for which we are bound. It is there that I shall introduce to you the Sieur de la Tournoire."

Mademoiselle looked at the distant towers and the mountains beyond with an expression of dread. She gave a heavy sigh and shuddered in her saddle.

"Nay, mademoiselle," I said; "you have nothing to fear there."

She turned pale, and answered, in a trembling voice:

"Alas, monsieur! Am I not about to put those mountains between myself and my father?"

I thought of the joy that I should cause and the gratitude that I should win, should I succeed in bringing her father safe to her on those mountains, but I kept the thought to myself.

We skirted Clochonne by a wide détour, fording the Creuse at a secluded place, and ascended the wooded hills in single file. After a long and toilsome progress through pathless and deeply shaded wilds, we reached, in the afternoon, the forest inn kept by Godeau and his wife. It had been my intention to stop and rest here, and to send Blaise ahead to Maury, that one of the rooms of our ruined château might be made fit for mademoiselle's reception. I had expected to find the inn, as usual, without guests, but on approaching it we heard the sound of music proceeding from a stringed instrument. We stopped at the edge of the small, cleared space before the inn and sent Blaise to reconnoitre. He boldly entered and presently returned, followed

by the decrepit Godeau and his strapping wife, Marianne. Both gave us glad welcome, the old man with obsequious bows which doubtless racked his rheumatic joints, the woman with bustling cordiality.

"Be at ease, monsieur," said Marianne. "We have no one within except two gypsies, who will make music for you and tell your fortunes. Godeau, look to the horses."

I dismounted and assisted mademoiselle to descend. Then, on the pretext of giving an order, I took Marianne and Godeau aside, and bade them to address me as M. de Launay, not on any account as M. de la Tournoire. The old man then saw to our horses, and Marianne brought us wine.

"Before sunset," I said to mademoiselle, as I raised my glass, "you shall meet the Sieur de la Tournoire at his hiding-place."

Mlle. de Varion turned pale, and, as if suddenly too weak to stand, sat down on a wooden bench before the inn door. Jeannotte ran to support her.

"Before sunset!" she repeated, with a shudder.

"Yes, mademoiselle, unless you are too ill to proceed. I fear the fatigue of this ride has been too much for you."

She gave a look of relief, and replied:

"I fear that it has. I shall be better able to go on to-morrow, — unless there is danger in remaining here."

"'There is very little danger. People crossing the mountains by way of Clochonne now use the new road, which is shorter. If, by any chance, soldiers from the Clochonne garrison should come this way and detain us as fleeing Huguenots, we could summon help, — for we are so near the hiding-place of the Sieur de la Tournoire."

Again that shudder! Decidedly, in the accounts that she had received of me, I must have been represented as a very terrible personage. I smiled at thinking of the surprise that awaited her in the disclosure of the truth.

It was thereupon arranged that we should stay at Godeau's inn until the next morning. Mademoiselle's portmanteaus were carried to the upper chamber, which was a mere loft, but preferable to the kitchen. Thither, after eating, she went to rest. Blaise then departed to direct the desired preparations at Maury, with orders to return to the inn before nightfall. Jeannotte and the two boys remained in the kitchen to hear the music of the two gypsies, a man and a girl. Having nothing better to do, I took my seat on the bench outside the inn and sat musing.

Late in the afternoon, I heard the light step of mademoiselle on the threshold. On seeing me, she stopped, as if it were I whom she had come out to seek. I rose and offered her the bench. She sat

down in silence, and for a moment her eyes rested on the ground, while on her face was a look of trouble. Suddenly she lifted her glance to mine and spoke abruptly, as if forcing herself to broach a subject on which she would rather have been silent.

"Monsieur," she said, "I suppose that the Sieur de la Tournoire, whom we are so soon to meet, is a very dear friend of yours!"

"A very close friend," I replied, with an inward smile. "And yet he has got me into so much trouble that I might fairly consider him my enemy."

"I must confess," said she, "that I have heard little of him but evil."

"It is natural that the Catholics in Berry should find nothing good to say of him," I replied. "Yet it is true that he is far from perfect, — a subtle rascal, who dons disguises, and masquerades as other than he is, a leader of night-birds, and sometimes a turbulent roysterer."

"I have been told," she said, "that he treacherously killed a man in Paris, and deserted from the French Guards."

"As for the killing," I replied, "there was no treachery or unfairness on his part; and if he deserted from the King's French Guards, it was when the King had consented to give him up to the Duke of Guise, whom the weak King, then as now, hated as much as feared."

She gave a heavy sigh, and went on, "La Tournoire is a brave man, of course?"

"He is a man," I said, "who expects to meet death as he meets life, cheerfully, not hoping too much, not fearing anything."

"And this hiding-place of his," she said, in a very low voice, again dropping her glance to the ground. "Tell me of it."

I gave her a description of the ruined Château of Maury.

"But," she said, "is not the place easily accessible to the troops of the Governor?"

"The troops of the garrison at Clochonne have not yet found the way to it," I replied. "The château was abandoned twenty years ago. Its master is an adventurer in the new world, if he is not dead. Its very existence has been forgotten, for the land pertaining to it is of no value. The soldiers from Clochonne could find it only by scouring this almost impenetrable wilderness."

"Is there, then, no road leading to it?" she asked.

"This road leads hither from Clochonne, and on southward across the mountain. There are the remains of a by-road leading from here westward to the château, and ending there. But this by-road, almost entirely recovered by the forest, is known only to La Tournoire and his friends. A better way for the Governor's soldiers to find La Tour-

noire's stronghold, if they but knew, would be to take the road along the river from Clochonne to Narjec, and to turn up the hill at the throne-shaped rock half-way between those towns. At the top of that hill is Maury, hidden by dense woods and thickets."

Mlle. de Varion, who had heard my last words with a look of keen attention and also of bitter pain of mind, now rose and walked to and fro as if meditating. Inwardly I lamented my inability to drive from her face the clouds which I attributed to her increasing distress, as she found herself further and further from her father and her home, bound for still gloomier shades and wilder surroundings.

I asked if she would go in and hear the music of the gypsy, or have him come out and play for her, but she thanked me with a sorrowful attempt at a smile, and returned to her own chamber.

When the sun declined, I ordered Marianne to prepare the best supper that her resources would allow, and then, as it was time that Blaise should have been back from Maury, I went to a little knoll, which gave a view of a part of the abandoned by-road, to look and listen for him. Presently, I heard the sound of a horse's footfalls near the inn, and made haste back to see who rode there. Just as I reached the cleared space, I saw the rider disappearing around a bend of the road which led to

Clochonne. Though I saw only his back, I recognized him as mademoiselle's boy, Pierre, mounted on one of her horses.

On the bench before the inn sat mademoiselle herself, alone. She gave a start of surprise when I came up to her.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I have just seen your boy, Pierre, riding towards Clochonne."

"Yes," she replied, looking off towards the darkest part of the forest. "I — I was alarmed at your absence. I did not know where you had gone; I sent him to look for you."

"Then I would better run after and call him back," I said, taking a step towards the road.

"No, no!" she answered, quickly. "Do not leave me now. He will come back soon of his own accord. I told him to do so if he did not find you. I must ask you to bear with me, monsieur. The solitude, the strangeness of the place, almost appal me. I feel a kind of terror when I do not know that you are near."

"Mademoiselle," I said, sitting beside her on the bench, "I cannot describe that which I shall feel, if I am doomed ever to know that you are not near me. It will be as if the sun had ceased to shine, and the earth had turned barren."

A blush mounted to her cheeks; she dropped her humid eyes; her breast heaved. For an instant she

seemed to have forgotten her distresses. Then sorrow resumed its place on her countenance, and she answered, sadly:

"Ah, monsieur, when you shall have truly known me!"

"Have I not known you a whole day?" I asked. "I wonder that life had any relish for me before yesterday. It seems as if I had known you always, though the joy that your presence gives me will always be fresh and novel. Ah, mademoiselle, if you knew what sweetness suddenly filled the world at my first sight of you!"

I took her hand in mine. She made a weak effort to withdraw it; I tightened my hold; she let it remain. Then she turned her blue eyes up to mine with a look of infinite trust and yielding, so that I felt that, rapid as had been my own yielding to the charm of her beauty and her gentleness, she had as speedily acknowledged in me the man by whom her heart might be commanded.

As we sat thus, the gypsy within, who had been for some time aimlessly strumming his instrument, began to sing. The words of his song came to us subdued, but distinct:

"The sparkle of my lady's eyes —
Ah, sight that is the fairest!
The look of love that in them lies —
Ah, thrill that is the rarest!

Oh, comrades mine, go roam the earth,
You'll find in all your roving
That all its other joys are worth
Not half the joys of loving!"

"Ah, mademoiselle," I whispered, "before yesterday those words would have meant nothing to me!"

She made no answer, but closed her eyes, as if to shut out every thought but consciousness of that moment.

And now the gypsy, in an air and voice expressive of sadness, as he had before been expressive of rapture, sang a second stanza:

"But, ah, the price we have to pay
For joys that have their season!
And, oh, the sadness of the day
When woman shows her treason!
Her look of love is but a mask
For plots that she is weaving.
Alas, for those who fondly bask
In smiles that are deceiving!"

I thought of Mlle. d'Arency, but not for long; for suddenly Mlle. de Varion started up, as if awakened from a dream, and looked at me with an expression of unspeakable distress of mind.

"Oh, monsieur!" she cried. "You must leave me! I must never see you again. Go, go, — or let me go at once!"

"Mademoiselle!" I cried, astonished.

"I beg you, make no objections, ask no questions! Only go! It is a crime, an infamy, for me to have listened while you spoke as you spoke a while ago! I ought not to have accepted your protection! Go, monsieur, and have no more to do with the most miserable woman in France!"

She started to go into the inn, but I caught her by the hand and detained her.

"Mademoiselle," I said, gently, "the difference in our religions need not forbid such words between us as I have spoken. I can understand how you regard it as an insuperable barrier, but it is really a slight one, easily removed, as it has been in many notable cases."

"Monsieur," she replied, resolutely, shaking her head, "I say again, we must part. I am not to be urged or persuaded. The greatest kindness you can do me is to go, or let me go, without more words."

"But, mademoiselle," I interposed, "it will be very difficult for you to continue your flight across this border without a guide. Not to speak of the danger from men, there is the chance of losing your way."

"The Sieur de la Tournoire will not refuse me his guidance," she said, in a voice that seemed forced to an unwonted hardness.

"Then you will discard my protection, and accept his, a stranger's?"

"Yes, because he is a stranger, — thank God!"

What, I asked myself, was to be the end of this? Would she not, on learning that La Tournoire was myself, all the more decidedly insist on going her own way? Therefore, before disclosing myself to her, I must accustom her to the view that a difference in religion ought not to separate two who love each other. In order to do this, I must have time; so I said:

"At least, mademoiselle, you will let me show you the way to Maury, and present to you the Sieur de la Tournoire. That is little to ask."

"I have already accepted too much from you," she replied, hesitating.

"Then cancel the obligation by granting me this one favor."

"Very well, monsieur. But you will then go immediately?"

"From the moment when you first meet La Tournoire, he shall be your only guide, unless you yourself choose another. In the meantime," I added, for she had taken another step towards the inn, "grant me at least as much of your society as you would bestow on an indifferent acquaintance, who happened to be your fellow-traveler in this lonely place."

She gave a sigh which I took as meaning that the more we should see each other, the harder the parting would be at last, but she said, tremulously:

"We shall meet at supper, monsieur, and to-morrow, when you conduct me on to Maury." Then she entered the inn, but stopped on the threshold, and, casting on me a strangely wistful look, she added, "Great must be the friendship between you and La Tournoire, that you can so confidently assure his protection to those for whom you ask it."

"Oh, I have done much for him, and he cannot refuse me any request that it is in his power to grant," I said, truly enough.

"Then," she went on, "the tie is one of obligation, rather than of great friendship?"

"Yes. I have often been in a position to do him great services when no one else was, and when he most needed them. As for my feeling of friendship for him, I shall not even weep when he is dead."

"Suppose you should love a woman," she continued, with a strange eagerness, "and there should come a time when you would have to choose between your love for her, and your friendship for this man, which would prevail?"

"I would sacrifice La Tournoire for the woman I loved," I answered, with truth.

She looked at me steadily, and a hope seemed to dawn in her eyes, but in a moment they darkened again; she sighed deeply, and she turned to ascend to her chamber, while I stood there trying to deduce a meaning from her strange speeches and conduct,

which I finally put down to the capriciousness of woman. I could understand the feeling that she ought to part from a man who loved her and whom her religion forbade her to love in return; but why she should seem pleased at the apparent lukewarmness of my friendship for La Tournoire, whom she was willing to accept as her guide, I could not guess. Since she intended to part from me, never to see me again, what mattered it to her whether or not I was the intimate of a proscribed ruffian? Yet she seemed glad to hear that I was not, but this might be only seeming. I might not have read her face and tone aright. Her inquiries might have been due to curiosity alone. So I thought no more of them, and gave my mind instead to planning how she might be made to ignore the difference between our religions, and to revoke the edict banishing me from her side. It would be necessary that she should be willing to remain at Maury, with a guard composed of some of my men, while I, giving a pretext for delaying the flight and for the absence of myself and the most of my company, should attempt the delivery of her father from the château of Fleurier. It was my hope, though I dared not yet breathe it, that I might bring her father and my company back to Maury, and that all of us might then proceed to Guienne.

My meditations were interrupted by the return of Blaise from Maury, where he had found all well and

the men there joyous at the prospect of soon rejoining the army in Guienne. A part of the company was absent on a foraging raid. Two of the roofed chambers were rapidly being made habitable for Mlle. de Varion, whom Blaise had announced to the men as a distinguished refugee.

When supper was ready in the kitchen, I sent Jeannotte to summon her mistress. Mademoiselle came down from her chamber, her sweet face betokening a brave attempt to bear up under the many woes that crushed her, — the condition of her father, her own exile, the peril in which she stood of the governor's reconsidering his order and sending to make her prisoner, the seeming necessity of exchanging my guidance for that of a stranger who had been painted to her in repulsive colors, and the other unhappy elements of her situation.

"It is strange that the boy, Pierre, has not returned," I said, while we sat at table.

Mademoiselle reddened. It then occurred to me that, in her abstraction, she had not even noticed his absence, and that now it came on her as a new trouble.

"Pardon me for speaking of it in such a way as to frighten you," I said. "There is no cause for alarm. Not finding me on the road, he may have turned into the woods to look for me, and so have lost his way. He would surely be able to find the road again."

"I trust he will not come to any harm," replied mademoiselle, in a low voice that seemed forced, as if she were concealing the fears that she really felt.

Jeannotte cast a sympathetic look at her mistress.

"Shall I go and look for him?" asked Hugo, showing in his face his anxiety for his comrade.

"You would lose yourself, also," I said. "Mademoiselle, I shall go, for I know all the hillocks and points of vantage from which he may be seen."

"Nay, monsieur, do not give yourself the trouble, I pray you."

But I rose from the table, to show that I was determined, and said:

"Blaise, I leave you as guard. Remember last night."

"I am not likely to forget," he growled, dropping his eyes before the sharp glance of Jeannotte. "Mademoiselle need have no fears."

"But, monsieur," said mademoiselle. She was about to continue, but her eye met Jeannotte's, and in the face of the maid was an expression as if counselling silence. So mademoiselle said no more, but she followed me to the door, and stood on the threshold.

"Monsieur," she said, "if you do not find him within a few minutes, I entreat that you will not put yourself to further discomfort. See, it is already nearly dark. If he be lost in the woods for the

night, he can doubtless find his way hither to-morrow."

"I shall not seek long, mademoiselle, for the reason that I would not be long away from you."

At that moment, feeling under my foot something different from leaves or earth, I stooped and found one of mademoiselle's gloves, which she had dropped, probably, on first entering the inn. Remaining in my kneeling posture and looking up at her sweet, sad face, I said:

"Whatever may come in the future, mademoiselle, circumstance has made me your faithful chevalier for a day. Will you not give me some badge of service that I may wear forever in memory of that sweet, though sorrowful day?"

"Keep what you have in your hand," she replied, in a low voice, and pointed to her glove.

I rose, and fastened the glove on my hat, and said: "They shall find it on me when I am dead, mademoiselle." Then I turned to go in search of Pierre.

"I shall go to my room now," she said, "and so, good-night, monsieur!"

I turned, and made to take her hand that I might kiss it, but she drew it away, and then, standing on the threshold, she raised it as one does in bestowing a *benedicite*, and said:

"God watch you through the night, monsieur!"

"And you forever, mademoiselle!" said I, but

she had gone. For a moment I stood looking up at her chamber window, thinking how it had come over me again, as in the days of my youth, the longing to be near one woman.

Night was now coming on. In the deeper shades of the forest it was already dark, but the sky was clear, and soon the moon would rise. Musing as I went, I walked along the road that Pierre had first taken. The only sounds that I heard were the ceaseless chirps and whirrs of the insects of the bushes and trees.

When I had gone some distance, I bethought me of my heedlessness in coming away from the inn without my sword. I had taken this off before sitting down to eat, and at my departure my mind had been so taken up with other matters that I had omitted to put it on. My dagger was with it at the inn. At first I thought of returning for these weapons, but I considered that I would not be away long, and that there was no likelihood of my requiring weapon in these solitudes. So I continued on my way towards a knoll whence I expected to get a good view of the road, and thus, should Pierre be returning on that road, spare myself the labor of plunging into the wood's depths and listening for the footsteps of his horse or of himself.

I had walked several minutes in the increasing darkness, when there came to my ears, from the

shades at the right, the sound of a human snore. Had the boy fatigued himself in trying to find the way, and fallen asleep without knowledge of his nearness to the inn?

"Pierre!" I called. There was no answer.

I called again. Again there was no reply, but the snoring ceased. A third time I called. My call was unheeded.

I turned into the wilds, and forced my way through dense undergrowth. At a short distance from the road, I came on traces of the passage of some one else. Following these, I arrived at last at a small open space, where the absence of vegetation seemed due to some natural cause. Sufficient of the day's failing light reached the clearing to show me the figures of four men on the ground before me, three of them stretched in slumber, the fourth sitting up. The last held a huge old two-handed sword over his shoulder, ready to strike. The threatening attitude of this giant made me take mechanically a step backward, and feel for my sword. Alas, I was unarmed!

"So, my venturesome lackey, we meet again!" came a sarcastic voice from the left, and some one darted between me and the four men, facing me with drawn sword.

It was the Vicomte de Berquin, and a triumphant smile was on his face.

Moved by the thought that mademoiselle's safety

depended on me, I was not ashamed, being unarmed, to turn about for immediate flight. But I had no sooner shown my back to M. de Berquin, than I found myself face to face with the scowling Barbemouche, who stood motionless, the point of his sword not many inches from my breast.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE HERO GAVE HIS WORD AND KEPT IT.

I STOOD still and reflected.

"You lack a weapon," said M. de Berquin, humorously. "I shall presently give you mine, point first."

As I was still facing Barbemouche, I imagined the point of the Vicomte's sword entering my back, and I will confess that I shivered.

"And I mine," growled Barbemouche. "Though you are a lackey and I a gentleman, yet, by the grandmother of Beelzebub, I am glad to see you!"

"Indeed!" said I, whose only hope was to gain time for thought. "This is a heartier welcome than a stranger might expect."

De Berquin laughed. Barbemouche said, "You are no stranger."

"Then you know me?" said I. "Who am I?"

"You are the answer to a prayer," said Barbemouche, with an ugly grin. "You thought you fooled us finely last night, and that when you had made a hole in my body you had done with me. But I got a look at you after the mistake was dis-

covered, and I vowed the virgin a dozen candles in return for another meeting with you. And now she has sent you to me."

And he looked at me with such jubilant vindictiveness that I turned and faced De Berquin, saying:

"Monsieur the Vicomte, I have made up my mind that your visage is more pleasant to look on than that of your friend."

By this time, the other three rascals on the ground had been awakened by the tall fellow, and the four had taken up their weapons and placed themselves at the four sides of the open space, so that I could not make a bolt in any direction. All the circumstances that made my life at that time doubly precious rushed into my mind. On it depended the safety of Mlle. de Varion, the rescue of her father, the expeditious return of my brave company to our Henri's side, and certain valuable interests of our Henri's cause. I will confess that it was for its use to mademoiselle, rather than for its use to our Henri, that I most valued, at that moment, the life which there was every chance of my speedily losing. In De Berquin, and in Barbemouche as well, vengeance cried for my immediate death. Moreover, my death would remove the chief obstacle to De Berquin's having his will concerning Mlle. de Varion. For an instant, I thought he might let me live that I might tell him her whereabouts, but I perceived that my presence

was indication to him that she was near at hand. He could now rely on himself to find her. The opportunity of removing me from his way was not to be risked by delay. It was true that I might obtain respite by announcing myself as the Sieur de la Tournoire, for he would wish to present me alive to the governor, if he could do so. The governor and the Duke of Guise would desire to season their revenge on me with torture, and to attempt the forcing from me of secrets of our party. But to make myself known as La Tournoire was but to defer my death. The life that I might thus prolong could not be of any further service to mademoiselle or to Henri of Navarre. Still, I might so gain time. I might escape; my men might rescue me. So, as a last resource, I would save my life by disclosing myself; but I would defer this disclosure until the last possible instant. De Berquin and Barbemouche were evidently in for amusing themselves awhile at my expense. They would prolong matters for their own pleasure and my own further humiliation. Meanwhile, an unexpected means of eluding them might arise.

As for their presence there, I have always accounted for it on this supposition: That, after their defeat on the previous night, they had reunited in the woods, hidden themselves where they might observe our departure from the inn in the morning, followed us at a distance into the mountain for-

est, lost our track, and finally, knowing neither of Godeau's inn nor of their nearness to the road, dismounted, and sought afoot an open space in which to pass the night. Their horses were probably not far away.

"Ha!" laughed De Berquin, in answer to my words and movement. "So you don't share Barbemouche's own opinion of his beauty?"

An unctuous guffaw from the fat rascal, and a grim chuckle from gaunt François, indicated that Barbemouche's ugliness was a favorite subject of mirth with his comrades.

"The opinion of a dead lackey does not amount to much," gutturally observed Barbemouche. Doubtless I should have felt the point of his rapier between my shoulders but that he waited on the will of De Berquin.

His tone showed that he really had the high regard for his looks that De Berquin's words had implied. It afterward became evident to me that the ugliness of this burly rascal was equalled only by his vanity.

"Nor is a dead lackey half as useful as a living one can be," I said, looking De Berquin straight in the eyes.

"*Par dieu!* I admit that you have been very useful against me, and that is why I am going to kill you," replied De Berquin.

"Would it not be more worthy of a man of intellect, like the Vicomte de Berquin, if I have been useful against him, to make me pay for it by being useful for him?" I said, quietly, without having yet the least idea of what service I should propose doing him in return for my life.

"Most interesting of lackeys, how might you be useful to me?" inquired De Berquin, continuing his mood of sinister jocularity.

How, indeed? I asked myself. Aloud I answered slowly, in order to have the more time to think:

"In your present enterprise, monsieur."

"The devil! What do you know of my present enterprise?" he asked, quickly.

I saw that I had at least awakened his interest in the idea that I might be worth using alive.

"I will tell you," I answered, "if you will first ask this unpleasant person behind me to step aside."

"Unpleasant person!" repeated Barbemouche, astonished at my audacity. "You dog, do you speak in such terms of a gentleman?"

So he was under the delusion also that he possessed gentility.

"Stop, Gilles!" commanded De Berquin. "Go yonder, while I listen to this amusing knave. Let him talk awhile before he dies."

Barbemouche sullenly went over to the side of François, and stood there glowering at me. It was

a relief to know that his sword-point was no longer at my back.

"Now, rascal!" said De Berquin to me. "My present enterprise, and how you can be useful to me in it?"

"In the first place, monsieur," I began, having no knowledge how I was to finish, "you and your gallant company are doubtless tired, hungry, and thirsty —"

An assenting grunt from the tall fellow, and a look of keen interest on the faces of all, showed that I had not spoken amiss.

"You are quite lost in these woods," I went on. "You do not know how near you may be to any road or to any habitation, where you might have roof, food, and drink. Heaven, in giving me the pleasure of meeting you, has also done you the kindness of sending one who can guide you to these blessings. That is the first service I can do you."

"Very well, you shall do it. I can kill you as well afterwards."

"But I will not do it unless I have your promise, on your honor as gentlemen, to give me both my life and my liberty immediately."

"My very modest lackey, you greatly undervalue both your life and your liberty, if you think you can buy them from me at so small a cost. No; you offer too little. The pleasure of killing you far

exceeds that of having your guidance. Now that we have happily met you, we know that there must be shelter, food, and drink somewhere near at hand. We can find them for ourselves in as short a time, perhaps, as it would require you to take us there. We shall doubtless have the happiness of meeting there your very gallant master and the lady whom he protects with your arm and sword. Having robbed him of his means of guarding his lovely charge, I shall in fairness relieve him of the charge."

I perceived here the opportunity of learning whether it was under the governor's orders, received through Montignac, that De Berquin pursued mademoiselle while he came in quest of the Sieur de la Tournoire, or whether it was on his own account.

"Your infatuation for this lady must be very great," I said, in a tone too low for his four followers to distinguish my words, "to lead you to force your presence on her."

"*My* infatuation!" he repeated, and then he laughed. "My very knowing lackey, if you were better informed of my affairs, you would know that an infatuation for Mlle. de Varion is a luxury that I cannot at present afford. A man who has lost his estates, his money, his king's favor, and who has fled from his creditors in Paris to prey on the provinces, thinks not of love, but of how to refill his pockets."

"Then it is not for love that you pursue Mlle. de Varion?" I said. I now believed, as I had first thought, that the governor had changed his mind after ordering mademoiselle to leave the province, had decided to hold her in durance, and had commissioned De Berquin to detain her, as well as to hunt down me. But I put the question in order to get further time for thought.

"For love, yes; but not for mine!" was the answer.

This startled me. "For that of M. de la Chatre?" I asked, quickly.

"You seem to be curious on this point," said De Berquin, derisively.

"If I am to die," I replied, "you can lose nothing by gratifying my curiosity. If I am to live, I may be the better able to serve you if you gratify it."

"I am not one to refuse the request of a man about to die," he said, with a self-amused look. "It is not La Chatre, the superb, whose *amour* I have come into this cursed wilderness to serve."

"Then who —?" But I stopped at the beginning of the question, as a new thought came to me. "The secretary!" I said.

"Montignac, the modest and meditative," replied De Berquin.

I might have thought it. What man of his age,

however given to deep study and secret ambition, could have been insensible to her beauty, her grace, her gentleness? Such a youth as Montignac would pass a thousand women indifferently, and at last perceive in Mlle. de Varion at first glance the perfections that distinguished her from others of her sex. Doubtless, to him, as to me, she embodied an ideal, a dream, of which he had scarcely dared hope to find the realization. Seeing her at the inn, he had been warmed by her charms at once. He had resolved to avail himself of his power and of her helplessness. Her father in prison, herself an exile without one powerful friend, she would be at his mercy. Forbidden by his duties to leave the governor's side, he could charge De Berquin, in giving the latter the governor's orders concerning myself, with the additional task of securing the person of mademoiselle, that he might woo her at his leisure and in his own way. The governor, ready enough to frighten into an unwarranted exile a woman whose entreaties he feared, would yet not be so ungallant as to give her to his secretary for the asking. But Montignac might safely hold her prisoner, the governor would think that she had left the province, there would be none to rescue her. Such were the acts, designs, and thoughts that I attributed to the reticent, far-seeing, resolute secretary. All passed through my mind in a moment.

And now I feared for mademoiselle as I had not feared before. I never feared a man, or two men at a time, who came with sword in hand; but how is one to meet or even to perceive the blows aimed by men of thought and power? Such as Montignac, inscrutable, patient, ingenious, strong enough to conceal their own passions, which themselves are more intense and far more lasting than the passions of a mere man of fighting, are not easily turned aside from the quest of any object on which they have put their desires. One against whom they have set themselves is never safe from them while they live. Years do not make them either give up or forget. Montignac, by reason of his influence over the governor, had vast resources to employ. He could turn the machinery of government to his own ends, and the trustful governor not suspect. In that slim youth, smooth-faced, pale, repressed, grave, not always taking the trouble to erase from his features the signs of his scorn for ordinary minds, a scorn mingled with a sense of his own power and with a kind of derisive mirth, — in this quiet student I beheld an antagonist more formidable than any against whom I had ever been pitted. In thinking of him, I came at once to regard De Berquin, who still stood facing me with ready sword, and on his face the intention of killing me plainly written, as a very inconsiderable opponent, even when backed

by his four ruffians with their varied collection of weapons.

If I was to save Mlle. de Varion from the designs of the far-reaching secretary, it was time that I eluded the danger immediately confronting me.

For a few moments after De Berquin uttered the speech last recorded, I stood silent, my eyes meeting his.

"Come," he said, presently, impatiently giving several turns of his wrist so that his sword-point described arcs in the air before my eyes. "We wander from the subject. What service can you do me? Don't think you can keep me talking until your party happens to come up. I intend to kill you when I shall have counted twenty, unless before that time you make it appear worth my while to let you live. One, two, three —"

His look showed that he had ceased to be amused at my situation. Alive, I had begun to bore him. It was time to make sure of his vengeance. His men stood on all sides to prevent my flight. At my least movement, he would thrust his rapier deep into my body. He went on counting. What could I offer him to make him stay his hand? Was there anything in the world that he might desire which it would appear to be in my power to give him?

"Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen," he counted, taking exact note of the distance between us.

As in a flash the idea came to me.

"Monsieur," I said, loudly, so as to be plainly heard above his own voice, "let me go and I will deliver to you the Sieur de la Tournoire!"

He had reached nineteen in his count. He stopped there and stared at me.

"The Sieur de la Tournoire," he repeated, as if the idea of his taking the Sieur de la Tournoire were a new one.

"You speak, monsieur," said I, quietly, "as if you had not come to these hills for the purpose of catching him."

He looked at me with a kind of surprise, but said nothing in reply to my remark. "It is natural," thought I, "for him not to disclose his purpose, even when there is no use for him to conceal it."

"I take La Tournoire?" he said, presently, half to himself. He stood thinking for a time, during which I supposed that he was considering the propriety of his personally making the capture, in view of the plan that I had overheard Montignac suggest to the governor, namely, that the spy should merely lure La Tournoire into an ambush where the governor's soldiers should make the seizure. The spy had doubtless received orders strictly in accordance with this plan, La Tournoire being considered too great game to be bagged by anything less than a company of soldiers.

"Why not?" said I. "Whoever does so will receive a good price in addition to the gratitude of M. de la Chatre and that of the Duke of Guise. Indeed, the feat might even win you back the King's favor, which you say you have lost."

"But suppose Montignac has other plans for the capture of this highly valued rebel?" said he.

"If he had," said I, thinking of the arrangement as to the ambush, "they were made in the belief that La Tournoire was not to be taken by one man with a few hired knaves. The captor of La Tournoire can afford to earn Montignac's displeasure by deviating from his orders. Should you take this Huguenot, you would be in a position to snap your fingers at Montignac."

"But if it is in your power to give up La Tournoire, why do you not take him and get the reward? Why have you not done so already?"

"For the very fact which puts it in my power to do so. I am of his party. I am his trusted counsellor, lackey that I pretend to be."

"I have, from the first, thought you a most exceptional lackey. But if you are of his party, and in his secrets, you must be a vile traitor to give him up. That being the case, you would not hesitate to lie to me. Indeed, even if it were not the case, you would not hesitate to lie to me, to save yourself or to gain time."

"As to my being a vile traitor, a man will descend to much in order to save his life. As to my readiness to lie to you, it seems to me that, in the present situation, you are the one man to whom I cannot now afford to lie. With your sword at my throat, it is much easier for me to be a vile traitor to La Tournoire than to lie to you. Besides, I have my own reasons for disliking him, notwithstanding that my cause and his are the same."

"And how do you propose to give him up to me?"

"By merely bringing him face to face with you."

"*Par dieu!* A charming proposition! How do I know that you will not, in pretending to betray him to me, really betray me to him? Suppose you do bring him face to face with me, and his men are all around?"

"Only one of his men shall be present," I said, thinking of Blaise. "He will not come without this one man. As for the others of his band, not one shall be within a league."

"Himself and one man," said De Berquin, musingly. "That is to say, two very able fighters."

"There are five of you."

"But this Tournoire is doubtless worth three men in a fight, and his man will probably be worth two more. I don't think your offer sufficiently attractive. I think I would do better to kill you. Cer-

tainly, there are many reasons why you should die. If you should escape me now, as you are one of La Tournoire's people, you would immediately go to him and tell him of my presence here. I do not choose that he shall know as much about me as you do."

"Can you suggest any amendment to my offer, so that it might be more attractive?"

"If you could bring La Tournoire unarmed—"

"I will do that," I said.

De Berquin looked at me steadily for some time. At last he shook his head and said:

"It is a fair bargain, as it now stands, but I see no way of your carrying out your part without putting me in danger of your betraying me. To find La Tournoire, you would have to leave us. Once out of our sight, you would be free to ignore the contract, laugh at me for being so easily gulled, and set La Tournoire and his men on me, which would entirely spoil my plans. Every minute I see more and more the necessity of killing you."

"But I shall find La Tournoire without going out of your sight," I said.

De Berquin again became thoughtful. Then he laughed.

"You mean that you would lead us up to his very den, where we should be at the mercy of his men," he said.

"I have already said that, with one exception,

none of his men shall be within a league of where you are to meet him."

"I do not see how you are going to bring him so far from his men, if you do not go for him."

"Leave that to me. I shall take you to a place where he will present himself unarmed. Excepting the man who will be with him, not one of his company shall be within a league."

"Where is the place?" asked De Berquin, still smiling ironically.

"Not far from here. It is a place where you can get also wine and food."

"And how am I to know that this place is not a trap into which you wish to lead me?"

"You shall walk behind me with drawn sword and dagger. At the slightest suspicious movement or speech that I make, you can easily kill me."

"That is true. Yet I might lose my own life the next moment. Who knows but that you are merely seeking to sell your life as dearly as possible, or but that you are aiming to gain time in the hope of some unexpected occurrence?"

"Monsieur," said I, "we both know that men cannot read the heart. You cannot be sure whether or not I am lying. You indeed take the risk that I wish to lead you where you will have to pay for my life with your own, and that I am trying to gain time; but, at the same time, there is the chance that I in-

tend to keep my word, that I intend to present the Sieur de la Tournoire unarmed, and a league away from all his men but one. Is not that chance worth the risk? Have you not gambled, monsieur?"

From the shrug of De Berquin's shoulders, I knew that he had gambled, and also that my argument had moved him. But another doubt darkened his face.

"And if you do bring an unarmed person before me, how shall I know that it is La Tournoire?" said he.

"He shall tell you so himself."

"Excellent proof!"

"What man but La Tournoire would risk his life by declaring himself to be that proscribed gentleman?"

"One of his followers might do so, if he thought that he might so throw an enemy off La Tournoire's track."

"Then the possibility of my deceiving you on that point is but an additional risk you run, in return for the chance of your bagging the real game. Besides, I give you my word of honor that I will truly perform all that I promise."

"The word of a lackey!" said De Berquin, derisively.

"Have you not yourself described me as an exceptional lackey?"

"Well, I love to take chances. And as you have

given me your word, the word of an exceptional lackey, I give you my word, the word of a gentleman, that if you set La Tournoire unarmed before me, with but one of his men at hand, I will give you your life and freedom. But stay! At what time am I to have the pleasure of meeting him?"

"When we hear the stroke of eight from the tower of the church in Clochonne. The wind this evening is from that direction. It is agreed, then?"

"Agreed!" said De Berquin. "Jacques, give me your dagger. Now, Master Lackey, lead the way. Follow, you rascals, and be ready to knock down any person to whom I shall direct your attention."

And I turned and led the way to the road, followed closely by De Berquin, who held his sword in one hand and the dagger in the other. I heard the others fall in line, and tramp their way through the brush behind him. Barbemouche must have been exceedingly surprised at his leader's proceedings, for the conversation between De Berquin and myself had been conducted in a tone too low for their ears.

When we reached the road, De Berquin ordered a halt. He then commanded Barbemouche to walk at my left side, and François to walk at my right. De Berquin retained his place behind me, and the other two rascals followed him. In this order we proceeded towards the inn.

My object in leading my enemies to the inn was to set them drinking. As long as the possibility of taking La Tournoire was before De Berquin, there was little likelihood that he would seek to molest Mlle. de Varion. In the first place, he could not take her from the vicinity while he himself remained there awaiting the coming of La Tournoire. Secondly, he would not court any violence during the time of waiting, lest he might thereby risk his chance of taking La Tournoire. But it was necessary that I should prevent his encountering Blaise or Hugo, for either one, on seeing me conducted by him as I was, might make some demonstration that would cause De Berquin to kill me immediately. I must contrive to keep my enemies from entering the inn, and yet to have them plied with drink. Therefore, I said, as we marched:

"Monsieur, we are approaching a kind of inn where there are to be obtained the food and drink that I promised. But in the house are some who are devoted to the Sieur de la Tournoire. They are not any of his soldiers, nor such as are to be feared in a fight. But if they saw you and your men, with me as a prisoner, they would certainly convey word to La Tournoire or his band, and so it would be impossible for me to fulfil my agreement. It is true that you would then kill me, but you would lose La Tournoire, and have his followers soon on

your heels. So it is best that we stop at some distance from the inn. You and I can steal up to a spot where I can quietly summon the hostess. She will do anything I ask. She will, at my order, secretly bring food and wine to the place of waiting, and will not betray our presence to those in the inn."

"It seems a good idea," said De Berquin; "but if you attempt to make a fool of me —"

"You will, of course, instantly make a corpse of me, for you will be at my side, and will hear every word that I speak to the hostess."

"Very well," he replied.

Having at last reached a little clearing by the roadside quite near the inn, but hidden from it by trees, I gave the word to stop. De Berquin ordered his men to remain here, sheathed his sword, clutched me by the arm, and walked forward with me, his dagger held ready to be plunged into my heart at the slightest cause.

I led him to the back of the inn, and we stood near the door of the kitchen, listening.

The gypsy was still playing, and every now and then there came an exclamation of approval from Blaise. I peered through a corner of the window. The clutch of De Berquin on my arm tightened as I did so. I saw the gypsy man playing, Blaise and Hugo sitting with wine mugs before them, old

Godeau by the fire asleep, the gypsy girl with her head on the table, she also asleep, and Marianne removing platters from the table. Jeannotte had doubtless gone up the ladder to her mistress.

Presently Marianne came out with some bones of a fowl, to throw them away.

"Marianne," I called, softly. "Not a word! Come here and listen."

With some astonishment she obeyed. De Berquin now held his drawn dagger under his cloak, and his clutch on my arm, though tight, might yet appear to her that of a friend.

"Marianne," said I, "it is very important that no one within — no one, remember — shall know that this gentleman is with me. I have a serious matter to talk over with him at the clearing yonder, where four of his people now wait. No one is to know of their presence any more than of his. Bring plenty of wine to us there with what food you can get without exciting the curiosity of those inside. Do you understand? But not a word, even to me now."

She nodded her head, and went back into the kitchen. I knew that I could rely on her. "Come, monsieur," I whispered to De Berquin, and we went silently back to the clearing.

The four rascals were seated on the ground, conversing in low tones. De Berquin and I sat down in the midst of the group. The fellows went on talk-

ing, regardless of the presence of their leader, who gave no heed to their babble, except occasionally by a gesture to caution Barbemouche to lessen his volume of voice.

"I never knew an enterprise to run smoothly which had anything to do with women," Barbemouche was saying. "Where men only are concerned, one knows exactly what to do, and makes no mistakes."

"You have a prejudice against the sex," put in the foppish fellow.

"*Par dieu!* I ought not to have!" answered Barbemouche. "I owe them too much for the many favors I've had from them. But they are mystifying creatures. To mistake a maid for her mistress is nothing remarkable. For that matter, I've known women of the lower orders who had more airs than great ladies. I remember once, after having just made an easy conquest of a countess, and become ennuied with her, I turned my attention to the daughter of a pastry-cook in Paris. She dug deep holes in my face for merely trying to kiss her. She had velvet lips, that girl, but what claws!"

The gaunt rascal, whom they called François, heaved a pensive sigh, as if this reminiscence awakened touching memories in him.

"And yet, to show the perversity of the sex," continued Barbemouche, "that same day I saw an-

other man kiss her, and she gave him back two kisses for his one."

"Perhaps he was a handsome man," said the fat fellow, sagely.

"Yes," replied Barbemouche, ingenuously, "but no handsomer than I."

"At that time you were probably handsomer even than you are now," dryly observed the gaunt man.

"You are right," said Barbemouche, "for I was young, and I did not have this scar," and he thrust back the rim of his hat and laid his hand on his forehead.

"In what fight with the watch did you get that?" inquired François.

"I got it as the Duke of Guise got his, fighting the enemies of the church, though not in the same battle. I received mine that St. Bartholomew's night when we made the streets of Paris flow with heretic blood. A cursed Huguenot gave it me, but I gave him another to match mine, and left him for the crowd to trample over."

I gave a start, recalling the incident of which I had so recently heard the account, and which seemed the counterpart of this.

At this moment, Marianne appeared at the bend of the road. She carried a huge wooden platter, on which were a bowl of mulled wine, some mugs, and some cheese, bread, and scraps of cold meat. I

afterward learned that she had begun to prepare this wine some time before, thinking that I and Blaise and the boys would want it after my return from my search for Pierre. Knowing Blaise's capacity, she had made ready so great a quantity.

Saying not a word, she set down the platter on the ground before me.

"That is well," I said. "Now go back to the inn and step often to the door, so that I can easily summon you again without attracting the attention of the others. And get more wine ready."

The woman nodded, and went back to the inn.

The four ruffians made an immediate onslaught on the platter. De Berquin and François ignored the food, that they might the sooner dip their mugs into the bowl of wine. The other three speedily disposed of all the eatables, and then joined in the drinking. De Berquin, in order to grasp his mug, had let my arm go, but he retained his dagger in his other hand, and each of his followers used but one hand in eating or drinking, holding a weapon in the other.

"Look you, rascals!" said De Berquin to his men, presently. "Be careful to keep your wits about you!"

"Rascals!" repeated the tall fellow, his pride awakened by his second mug of wine. "By the bones of my ancestors, it goes against me to be so often called rascal!"

Barbemouche saw an opportunity to retaliate for the fun that had been made of his pretensions to beauty. "They whom the term fits," he growled, "ought not to complain, if I endure it, who am a gentleman!"

Instantly the bearded giant was on his feet, with his huge sword poised in the air.

"Rascal yourself twice over, and no gentleman!" he cried, quivering with noble wrath.

"What, you lank scarecrow!" said Barbemouche, rising in his turn, and rushing to meet the other.

Their fat comrade now rose and thrust his sword between the two, for the purpose of striking up their weapons. The fop ran behind a tree, to be safe from the fracas.

At the instant when François was about to bring his great sword down on Barbemouche, and the latter was about to puncture him somewhere near the ribs, there came the sound of the Angelus, borne on the breeze from Clochonne. The two antagonists stood as if transformed into statues, their weapons in their respective positions of offence. Each in his way moved his lips in his accustomed prayer until the sound of the distant bell ceased.

"Now, then, for your dirty blood!" roared Barbemouche, instantly resuming animation.

But his fat comrade knocked aside Barbemouche's

sword, and at the same time pushed François out of striking distance.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," cried the fat rascal, reproachfully, "would you spoil this affair and rob me of my share of the pay? God knows we are all gentlemen, and rascals, too!"

"Very well," said Barbemouche, relieved by his brief explosion of wrath, "this matter can wait."

"I can wait as well as another man," said François, with dignity, whereupon both men resumed their seats on the turf and their attentions to the wine. The prudent Jacques returned to the circle, and De Berquin, who during the squabble had employed himself entirely in holding me from any attempt at escape, looked relieved.

The effect of the wine on him was to make him merry, so that he soon invited me to join in the drinking, and I made a pretense of doing so. When the bowl was empty, he went with me again to summon Marianne, which we easily did, as she was standing at the door awaiting my reappearance. She brought us another pot of wine, and left us as she had before done. De Berquin became more and more gaily disposed. He put no limit to the quantity imbibed by his men; yet he kept his eyes on me, and his dagger dangerously near my breast.

When we heard the clock in Clochonne strike seven, he said to his men:

"Straighten up, you dogs! In another hour we shall have work to do." Turning to me, he added, with a grin, "Either to chain that wild beast, La Tournoire, or to send the most entertaining of valets to find out whether all that they say of purgatory and hell is true."

But he soon became so lax under the influence of the wine that he did not heed when the fat man and the ragged dandy dropped off to sleep and mingled their snores with the murmurs of the forest insects. He began to narrate his adventures, amatory, military, bibulous, and other. Presently, for a jest, he drank the health of Henri of Navarre in return for my drinking that of the Pope.

By this time Barbemouche and gaunt François had added their breathings to the somnolent choir.

"You are a mighty drinker, monsieur," I said to De Berquin, admiringly, at the same time refilling my own mug.

"Ask of the cabaret keepers of Paris whether the Vicomte de Berquin can hold his share of the good red vine-juice!" he replied, jubilantly, dipping his mug again into the pot.

I took a gulp from my mug and pretended to choke. In one of my convulsive movements, I threw the contents of my mug into the eyes of De Berquin. I followed it an instant later with the mug itself, and he fell back on the grass, half-

stunned. In the moment when his grasp of my arm was relaxed, I slipped away from him, narrowly missing the wild dagger stroke that he made at me. A second later and I was on my feet. My first act was to possess the weapons of Barbemouche and François, these two being nearest me. I then ran towards the inn, calling at the top of my voice, "Blaise! To arms!"

Behind me I heard De Berquin, who had risen, kicking the prostrate bodies of his men and crying:

"Up, you drunken dogs! We have been fooled! After him!"

Then I heard him running after me on the road, swearing terribly.

From the place where he had left his men, I could hear them confusedly swearing and questioning one another, all having been rudely awakened from sleep, two of them being unable to find their weapons, and none knowing rightly what had occurred or exactly where their leader had gone.

Blaise came running out of the inn, with sword drawn. When he had joined me, I stopped and turned to face De Berquin. He was before me ere I had time to explain to Blaise. In his rage, he made a violent thrust at me, which Blaise turned aside. De Berquin then leaped back, to put himself on guard.

At that instant, the first stroke of eight came from the distant tower of Clochonne.

"Filthy cur, you have lied to me!" cried De Berquin.

"Nay, monsieur," I answered, throwing from me the weapons of Barbemouche and François, "I keep my word. I promised you La Tournoire unarmed. Behold him!"

And I stepped out from beside Blaise and stood with open arms.

"La Tournoire!" repeated De Berquin, taking a backward step and staring at me with open mouth.

"La Tournoire!" came in a faint, horror-stricken voice from behind me.

I turned and beheld mademoiselle, who had come out from the inn on hearing my call for Blaise. With her were Hugo and Jeannotte. Behind were the inn-keepers and the gypsies. On mademoiselle's face, which was lighted by a torch that Hugo carried, was a death-like pallor, and such a look of horror, grief, and self-reproach, as I have never seen on any other human countenance.

"Mademoiselle!" I cried, hastening to her side. "What is the matter?"

"'Tis but — surprise, — M. de la Tournoire!" she answered, weakly, raising her hand feebly as if to keep me from approaching her, while her eyes, which were fixed on mine as by a terrible fascina-

tion, seemed to be starting from her head. An instant later, she fell in a swoon, and I was just in time to save her from striking the ground and to pillow her head on my arm.

As for De Berquin, he had made a rush at me, but Blaise had repulsed him with such fury that, seeing no hope of being joined by his men, he soon turned and fled.

I bore the senseless body of mademoiselle into the inn, vainly asking myself why she had shown so profound a distress at my disclosure.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE CHÂTEAU OF MAURY.

PRESENTLY mademoiselle recovered from her faintness and went up to her chamber, supported by Jeannotte. Her eyes met mine as she was about to go, but she immediately dropped them, and seemed by an effort to repress some kind of emotion.

With a heart saddened by the sight of mademoiselle's distress, I then made arrangements for the night. I was to lie at the front door of the inn, Blaise at the rear door, Hugo and the gypsies in the horse sheds, Marianne in the chamber with mademoiselle and Jeannotte, old Godeau where he chose. It happened that he chose a place before the smouldering fire in the kitchen.

Any further attempt to find Pierre that night was out of the question. I dared not leave the inn again, lest I should expose mademoiselle to possible molestation, or myself to an encounter with those from whom I had just escaped. Had mademoiselle's safety not depended on that of myself and Blaise, I might have invited such an encounter for myself or

for him or for both, but I would not have her undergo the slightest risk of losing her protectors.

I had little apprehension of seeing De Berquin or his men again that night. Not that he would probably remember his promise to give me my life and liberty in return for my bringing La Tournoire before him. Even that promise, if still respected by him, did not affect him in regard to mademoiselle. But he would consider that, though I was not accompanied by any of my own men except Blaise, mademoiselle's boy, Hugo, would wield a stout arm on our side. Unless he knew something of Pierre's disappearance, he would count that active youth also with our forces. He had doubtless taken in at a glance the group composed of Godeau, the gypsies, and Marianne; and he would suppose that I could reckon on assistance of one kind or another from some or all of these. Thus, having no odds in his favor, and knowing that we would be on the alert, he would be little likely to make any kind of demonstration against us. Moreover, two of his men finding themselves without their weapons, and all of them angry at the manner of their awakening, they would probably receive very badly the curses that he would heap on them for their failure to come up to his support. Their attitude would, for the rest of that night, be one of mutiny. It was likely that he would retreat and meditate a new plan. He would not feel

safe in the immediate vicinity of the inn, for it would occur to him that I might send one of my allies to my men with orders to take him. So he would withdraw and either give up the enterprise entirely or form a new design.

Now that he knew that I was La Tournoire, what would he do? Abandon his mission, since my knowledge of him would put me on my guard against him, and forbid his winning my confidence and betraying me in the way which, I supposed, Montignac had dictated to him? It was not likely that such a man, having found only one road by which he might regain the good things he had lost, would be turned aside from that road. He would follow it to success or death. Such men are too indolent to go about seeking opportunities. Having found one, they will pursue it wherever it may lead. Their fortunes are so desperate that they have only their lives to lose, and they are so brave that they do not fear death. If they can gain the stakes, so much the better. If not, little the worse. Meanwhile, they are occupied in a way congenial to a man who loves adventure, who has inherited the taste for danger, and finds a pleasurable excitement in risking his life. Therefore I felt that De Berquin was not yet through with me, but he would have to change his plan, and, until he should have time to compose new measures, he would not trouble us.

As I lay in the silence, my thoughts turned from De Berquin to Mlle. de Varion. Her demonstration on learning that I was La Tournoire was in harmony with the manner in which she had previously questioned me concerning my friendship for the bearer of that name. Grieved at the thought that I was his friend, relieved at my assertion that I did not so highly esteem him, she had shown the utmost horror on learning that I was the man himself. Could this be due entirely to the impression conveyed by a name to which the Catholics in Berry had attached so much dread? It was natural that one should regard with some terror a man whose deeds had been so exaggerated by vulgar report; but this fact did not explain the intensity of mademoiselle's emotion at the moment of my disclosure. Yet she had attributed that emotion entirely to surprise. Perhaps the extraordinary manifestation of that surprise was due to her fatigued and dejected condition. Or it might be, and I felt a delicious thrill at the thought, that it was her concern for me, her fear that my life might be the more imperilled by my relations with this proscribed man, that had caused the distress accompanying her first inquiries. If this was true, the discovery that I was no other than the man proscribed, and all the more in danger, would naturally have profoundly affected her.

In the morning she came down from her loft, pale

and showing a calmness that seemed forced. To my greeting and my announcement that Pierre had not returned, she replied, quietly:

"He is a faithful and honest boy, and I have prayed that no harm might befall him. His disappearance must not be allowed to alter your plans, M. de la Tournoire."

"I shall leave orders with Marianne and Godeau to conduct him to Maury, should he return to this place, as he very probably will. If you do not wish otherwise, we shall ride on to Maury this morning."

"I do not wish otherwise," she replied. After a moment's pause, she added, "Alas, monsieur, your friend, M. de Launay, when he promised me your guidance across the border, engaged you to a more tedious task than you might have wished to undertake. I fear that I must ask for a delay at Maury. You see what trouble your friend has brought you into, — waiting until a poor woman, who has been overcome by fatigue, recovers her energies."

"Ah, mademoiselle," I said, with delight, "you will then hold me to the promise made for me by my friend?"

"What else can a helpless woman do?" she asked, with a pretty smile, although there was a tremor in the voice.

I was overjoyed to be assured that she had ac-

cepted the situation. I had promised that, on her becoming acquainted with La Tournoire, she should have no other protector. This had meant to her, at the time when it was spoken, that I should go from her. To me it had meant, of course, that I should continue with her. I had feared that, on learning the truth, she would banish me. She had said that we must part. But now, despite the fact that the same barrier existed between me and her, whether I was La Tournoire or De Launay, despite her horror on learning that I was the former, she had abandoned her intention of parting from me. What had caused this change of mind? Had she, now that I was known to her as La Tournoire, ceased to entertain for me those feelings which she had, on account of our difference in religion, sought by an immediate separation to destroy? This was unlikely. La Tournoire or De Launay, I was the same man. I chose a happier explanation, — none other than that, considering by night, she had come to the conclusion that a religious difference was not too great a barrier to be removed, and that La Tournoire was not a person to be regarded with any horror. Though modesty might plead against her continuing in the company of a man with whom she exchanged such feelings as had so rapidly grown up between us, yet circumstance, most imperative of all dictators, showed her no other course than to remain under my guid-

ance and protection. So I accounted for the decision which was to keep us together for a few more days.

I was not sorry that she had asked for a delay at Maury. It relieved me of the necessity of making a pretext for retarding her flight while I should attempt the rescue of her father. The reason to be given for the absence of myself and a party of my men need not be a strong one when there was no apparent haste to continue the flight. I was still determined to keep the attempt in her father's behalf a secret from her if it should fail, and as a surprise for her if successful.

Inwardly jubilant with the hope inspired by her change of mind, I hastened to give the innocent reasons for the concealment of my identity from her. She listened with a changeless smile, keeping her eyes on mine. Before she could answer, Marianne announced that breakfast was ready. No further allusion was made to the matter, nor to her now abandoned determination that we should part.

After breakfast, our party of five mounted our horses, and, led by Blaise, forced our way through the high bushes that marked the beginning of the hardly perceptible road to Maury. The two gypsies followed afoot, for, knowing that I could rely on their fidelity and secrecy, I had bade them come, that their music and tricks might amuse mademoiselle during her stay at Maury.

It was a beautiful morning, and I considered that I had many reasons for joy. Mademoiselle, too, seemed affected by the sweetness and jocundity of the early day. She had evidently nerved herself, too, against her griefs. She seemed to have summoned a large stock of resolution to the task of facing her troubles without a tear. It appeared that she had banished dejection by an effort of the will. All the time it was evident that her manner was the result of a vigilant determination. I was, nevertheless, glad to see a smile, a steadiness of look, a set lip, though they were attained with premeditation. There was in her conversation, as we rode on our slow and difficult way, something of the woman of the world. As we had to go in single file, and so to speak loudly in order to be heard by one another, our talk could not take on the themes and tones of tenderness that I would have gladly given to it.

Presently from a bush at the side of the path a man sprang up, saluted, and stood respectfully while we passed him. It was one of my men, Maugert, on duty as sentry, for I kept men watching every approach to our hiding-place night and day. They lay secreted among the brushwood, and would observe an intruder long before the intruder could be aware of their presence. A few minutes later we passed another of these faithful sentinels, who rose out of his concealment to give me a look of welcome, and

soon afterward we rode through the ruined gate into the old courtyard itself.

"Welcome to Maury!" said I to mademoiselle.

She looked up at the broken façade of the château, around at the trees that environed the walls and in some places pushed their branches through openings, then at some of my men, who had been mending their clothes or tinkering at their weapons.

"I shall feel safe at Maury, monsieur," she said, quietly.

Thus Mlle. de Varion became my guest in that wilderness fastness. I gave her the two chambers in best preservation, one of them being immediately over the chief entrance and overlooking the courtyard. My own abode was in the northern turret, looking down the steep wooded declivity that fell to the road from Clochonne to Narjec. Hugo was to sleep outside her door. My own men made their beds in the great hall and in certain sheltered portions of the wings and outbuildings. They usually ate in this hall, receiving their food on platters from the cook (happily the kitchen had remained fit for use), and bearing it thither. It was arranged that Hugo should carry the meals of mademoiselle and Jeannotte to mademoiselle's apartments.

It was more after our arrival than during our ride to Maury that mademoiselle showed the fatigue of which she had spoken. It was evident that she had

reached a resting-place none too soon. Weakness was manifest in all her movements as well as in the pallor of her cheeks. Yet, though she languished thus, she did not keep all the time to her chamber. Each morning she came down to walk about the courtyard, saying that the air and sunshine — as much as found its way through the overspreading branches of the trees — strengthened her. There was in one corner of the yard an old stone bench, which, in good weather, was for a great part of the afternoon half in sun and half in shade. Here she would sit by the hour, changing her position as sunlight or shade became preferable for the moment.

Morning or afternoon, I was never far from her. For I had had to defer from day to day the first steps towards the projected deliverance of M. de Varion. On our arrival I had found that some of the men on whose aid I would most depend were away on a foraging expedition. Each hour I looked for their return, but in vain. Their absence had now become so prolonged as to be a cause of alarm. My anxiety about them, and my concern over other matters, took up so much of my mind that little was left in which to devise a plan for the rescue of the prisoner, and I would not make the first move until the whole design should be complete.

As days passed, and mademoiselle's missing boy, Pierre, did not come, I ceased to hope that we

should ever see him again. Had he found his way to the inn where he had left us, Marianne or Godeau would have brought him to Maury immediately. It was useless to speculate as to what might have become of him. He might have perished in the forest, or found his way to Clochonne, or fallen in with De Berquin and suffered for having been of our party. When his disappearance was mentioned, Jeannotte would look at mademoiselle, and mademoiselle would say:

"Poor boy! I pray that no evil may have befallen him. He was fidelity itself. He would die for me!"

But she did not give herself up to poignant sorrow on his account, or, indeed, since the night at Godeau's inn, on account of anything. She seemed to have set herself to bear her troubles in Spartan manner, and to find in herself, perhaps with surprise, the strength to do so.

So the days passed, and still my plans in regard to her father remained unformed, the men on whom I relied did not appear, and mademoiselle did not speak of resuming her flight southward. There came no further sign of the existence of De Berquin. From or of the outside world we heard nothing, save occasionally, when the wind was in the right direction, the faint sound of the bell of Clochonne. We seemed to dwell apart, in a region

of our own, an enchanted forest which none other might enter, a place where we were forever safe from the strife of humanity, the touch of war, the reach of the King's edicts, the power of provincial governors, the vengeance of the great. The gypsies remained with us, and sweetened the time with their songs and the music of their instruments. My men treated mademoiselle with the utmost respect. I had caused them to know that she was a refugee, a lady most precious in my esteem, one for whose safety and happiness any other consideration must, should occasion arise, be sacrificed. The weather was dry, sunny, and, for the time of year, mild. It was like a sweet dream, and I, for one, had no premonition of the awakening that was to come.

Often during that time I spoke of my love for her. I told her that, to me, at least, religion was not so much as to drive me from the woman whom I had so long sought in vain among the beauties of our Henri's court, whom I had so long worshipped in the ideal, whom I had instantly recognized as being the embodiment of that ideal, of whose presence I could not endure to be deprived even in thought.

She would sit looking in my eyes while I told her these things. Sometimes she would seem to yield to a kind of bliss in hearing them, to forget all else

than ourselves and my words. Then suddenly a look of anguish would come on her features, she would rise and press her hands to her eyes, as if to blot out the memory of my look, and say:

"Monsieur, you must not! You must not! You do not know! Oh, if you knew!"

And she would quickly glide away into the château, keeping her face turned from me until she had disappeared.

I began to think that there might be another obstacle than that of our difference in religion. Perhaps a promise to another or some vow! But I swore to myself that, whatever the obstacle might be, I would remove it. The only matter for present disposition was to get her consent to my doing so.

She would soon return, composed and smiling, with no sign of wishing to elude me. For the life of me, I could not long refrain from the subject that had before so strangely put her to flight.

Sometimes when I talked in the strain of love, joy and pain would succeed each other on her face, sometimes they would seem to be present at the same moment. From the look of complete abandonment to happiness that sometimes, though never for long, shone on her features, I felt that she loved me, and that eventually her love would gain the victory. I continually tried to elicit an expression of her feelings in words. Sweet to me as was the frequent

confession of her looks, I sought a confession in speech also.

One afternoon, as we stood on a little spur that rose from the declivity below the château, and whence through a small opening between trees could be seen the river, the smiling plain, and afar the high-perched château of Clochonne, I asked her:

"Why is it that when I speak of what most occupies my heart you become silent or sorrowful, or go suddenly from me?"

With assumed lightness she replied:

"Can a woman explain her capricious doings any more than a man can understand them? It is well known that we do unaccountable things."

Not heeding this evasion, I went on:

"I sometimes fear that you imagine some other barrier between us than the one of religion. Is it that some other gentleman —?"

"Oh, no, monsieur!" she answered, quickly and earnestly, before I had time to finish the question.

"Is there, then, some vow or girlish resolution?"

She shook her head negatively in reply, but would not give me any more satisfaction.

At last I said, abruptly, "Do you, then, wish me not to love you?"

She looked at me first as if she would answer yes, and then as if she would answer no, and finally, after a sigh, she said:

"Can we cause things by wishing?"

Finally, as a last means of trying her, I said:

"Mademoiselle, I have been thinking that it might be better if I were to go on alone to Guienne, and leave Blaise and my men to conduct you when you are able to follow."

She regarded me strangely, first as if the suggestion were a welcome one, then, — while her brow darkened, and a kind of mental anguish forced itself into her expression, — as if the plan were not at all acceptable.

"But you will not do that, monsieur?" was all that she said.

I could but sigh in puzzlement, and abandon my attempt to make her tell her feelings.

Sometimes I would suddenly turn my eyes towards her, and catch her looking at me with mingled tenderness and pity, as a man condemned to die might be looked on by the woman who loved him. At those times I thought that she had some fear or foreboding that I might yet fall a victim to the vengeance of those whom I had offended. Sometimes her look quite startled me, for it contained, besides a world of grief and pity, something of self-reproach. I then supposed that she blamed herself for allowing her fatigue to delay me in my departure from the province.

But these demonstrations did not often escape her.

She oftenest showed the forced cheerfulness that I have already mentioned. The moments when any kind of distress showed itself were exceptional, and many of them were caused by the persistence with which I sought a response in words to my declarations of love.

There came at last the afternoon — how well I remember it! — when we sat together on the stone bench in the sunlit part of the old courtyard. Through the interstices of the overspreading branches we could see a perfectly clear blue sky. The slightest movement of air made the leaves rustle sleepily, dreamily. Save the chirping of the birds, no other sound emanated from the forest. The murmur of the river at the foot of the wooded steep came up to us. In a corner of the yard the two gypsies lay asleep. Some of my men were off on various employments. A few had gone for game; others to fish. One of them, Frojac, was in Clochonne disguised as a peasant, to keep a watch on the garrison there. The party of foragers had not returned. Of the men at the château, those who were not on guard were with Blaise Tripault in the great hall, where they had just finished eating and drinking. Hugo had gone to the stables to feed mademoiselle's horses. Jeannotte was asleep in her chamber. Mademoiselle and I sat in silence, in the midst of a solitude, a remote tranquillity, a dreamy

repose that it was difficult to imagine as ever to be broken.

She seemed to yield to the benign influence of this enchanted place. She leaned back restfully, closed her eyes, and smiled.

Suddenly there came from within the château the sound of my men singing. Their rude, strong voices were low at first, but they rose in pitch and volume as their song progressed. Mademoiselle ceased to smile, opened her eyes, again took on the look of dark foreboding. The song had an ominous ring. It was one of the Huguenot war hymns sung in the army of our Henri:

"With pricking of steel
Our foe we have sped,
We've peppered his heel
With pellets of lead,
And the battles we win are the gifts of the Lord,
Who pointeth our cannon and guideth our sword.
We fire and we charge and there's nothing can bar
When we fight in the track of the King of Navarre.
Then down, down, down with the Duke of Guise!
Death, death, death to our enemies!
And glory, we sing, to God and our King,
And death to the foes of Navarre!"

The melody was grim and stirring. The men's voices vibrated with war-like wrath. They were impatient for battles, charges, the kind of fighting

that is done between great armies on the open field, when there is the roar and smoke of cannon, the rattle of small firearms, the clash of steel, the cries of captains, the shrieks and groans of wounded, the plenteous spilling of blood. They were hungry for carnage.

"There is no cause to shudder, mademoiselle," said I, perceiving the effect that the song had on her; "we are far away from fighting. There is no danger here."

"There may be dangers of which you do not guess," she answered.

As if to verify her words, a sudden, sharp cry broke the stillness. It came from the forest path by which we had arrived at the château. It was the voice of one of my sentinels challenging a newcomer.

"It is I," came the reply. "I have important news for the captain."

"Oh, it is you, Marianne?" replied the man on guard. "I didn't know you for an instant, you appeared so suddenly, without any noise."

I hastened to the gate and called, "Come, Marianne, what is it?"

She came up puffing and perspiring. So breathless was she that she had to sit down on a bench in the courtyard before she could answer me.

"Oh, monsieur!" she said, when she had re-

covered some breath. "Look to yourself! The governor of the province is at Clochonne!"

"The devil!" I said, and turned to see the effect of this news on mademoiselle.

She was standing, trembling, as white as death, her one hand on the back of the bench for support.

"Be not alarmed, mademoiselle," I said, "Clochonne is not Maury! They do not know our hiding-place. How did you learn, Marianne, and what else do you know?"

Mademoiselle stood perfectly still and fixed her eyes on Marianne, awaiting the latter's answers with apparently as much interest as I myself felt.

"Godeau went to Clochonne this morning with some eggs to sell, and learned that the governor arrived last night and occupies the château," said Marianne.

"With how many men?" I asked.

"Godeau said that the courtyard of the château and the market-place of the town were full of men-at-arms, but he did not wait to find out how many there were. He knew what he would catch from me if he did not immediately bring me the news, that I might let you know. So he came home at once, and as soon as I had heard it I started for this place."

"I thank you, Marianne. You are the best of women. Yet it may not be on our account that M. de la Chatre honors Clochonne with a visit."

It was, indeed, true that the governor would naturally visit his border towns at a time when war might be expected soon to enter his province. Yet I could not help thinking that his coming at this particular time had something to do with his plan to capture me. I remembered what course Montignac had advised him to take: to wait until his spy should have located me and sent him word of my hiding-place, then to come to Clochonne, whither the spy, on learning of his presence, should send him the information that would enable him to lay an ambuscade for me. This was a good plan, for a premature arrival of the governor at Clochonne might give me time to flee before my whereabouts should be known to the spy; but, knowing my exact whereabouts, La Chatre could first take measures for cutting off my flight, and then risk nothing by coming to Clochonne. Moreover, should the spy fail as to the ambush, the governor's acquaintance with my whereabouts would serve him in a chase that he might make with his soldiers. The ambush was but a device more likely to succeed than an open search and attack. It was, if at all possible, easier, and would cost the governor no lives.

Now, if the plan suggested by Montignac was being carried out, the governor's arrival at Clochonne meant that his spy had sent him word of my hiding-place. But could De Berquin have done

so? He had previously shown some skill in secret pursuit. Had he eluded the vigilance of my sentinels, learned that we were at Maury, and sent one of his men to the governor with the information? It was improbable, yet nothing occurs more often than the improbable. So I asked Marianne:

"Have you seen anything of the five men who drank with me the night you carried wine to us from the inn?"

"Not since that night, monsieur."

"And you have no more news than you have told me?"

"Nothing more, monsieur; so, if you please, I will hurry back, for my old man is sure to have fallen asleep, and it would be a pity if the governor's men should come by the forest road without being seen. Be sure, if they come after I reach home, you shall know of it in good time."

I bade her go, and turned to mademoiselle.

She was as pale as a white lily. As soon as my eye met hers, she said, in a faint voice:

"I am going in, monsieur. I am tired. No, I can go alone. Do not be concerned about me. I shall soon feel better."

And she went rapidly into the château, giving me no time in which to assure her that there was no reason for immediate alarm.

I wished to consider Marianne's news before com-

municating it to any of my men. I had to inquire of myself whether it called for any immediate action on my part. So that my meditations might not be interrupted, I left the château and walked into the forest.

For hours I considered the possible relations of the governor's arrival to mademoiselle's safety and my own, to that of my men and our cause, and to my intention of delivering M. de Varion from prison. But I could arrive at no conclusion, for I knew neither the governor's intentions, nor what information he had concerning me. There were so many probabilities and so many possible combinations of them, that at last I threw the whole matter from my mind, determining to await events. On the way back to the château I reproached myself for having wasted so much time in making useless guesses, for when I found myself at the gate it was night, and the moon had risen.

I stopped at the entrance and stood still to listen to the voice of Blaise, which rose in the courtyard in the words of a psalm. He sang it with a gentleness the very reverse of the feeling his voice had expressed in the war hymn a few hours earlier. From a sound that came between the words now and then, I knew that he was engaged in one of his favorite occupations, that of polishing his weapons.

Pleased to hear him singing in the moonlight,

I stood at the gate, lest by entering I might interrupt the psalm.

Presently, at the end of the stanza, I heard another voice from the doorway of the château.

"Ah, Blaise," said Jeannotte, "it is the spirit of your mother that controls you now."

He made no answer, nor did he resume his singing. Then I recalled that for the past few days he had not shown his former susceptibility to the maid's charms; he had, indeed, exhibited towards her a kind of disapproving shyness. I had not attached any importance to this.

"Why do you not go on singing your psalm?" Jeannotte asked, coming nearer to him.

His answer was a strange one. It was spoken with a kind of contemptuous irony and searching interrogation. The words were:

"Mademoiselle's boy Pierre has not yet come back to us."

"What has that to do with your singing?" said Jeannotte. "We all know it very well. Poor Pierre! To think that he may have been taken by Monsieur de Berquin!"

"It is well that he did not know the place of our destination when he went away," said Blaise, in the same insignificant tone, "else M. de Berquin might torture the secret out of him, and carry it to the governor of the province, for M. de Berquin knows

now that my master is La Tournoire. It would not be well for the boy, or any one else, to be the means of the governor's learning La Tournoire's hiding-place!"

After which words, spoken with a kind of ominous menace, Blaise abruptly left the girl, and strode around the corner of the château. The maid stood still a few moments, then went into the château.

Completely mystified, I crossed the courtyard and called Blaise.

"M. de la Chatre is at Clochonne," I said, abruptly, as soon as he was before me.

He stood still, returning my gaze. Presently he said:

"Do you think that he has learned where you are?"

"Through M. de Berquin?" I said, as if completing his question.

"Or any one else?" he said, in a low voice. "There was the boy who disappeared, for instance."

"But he did not know our hiding-place when he left. He did not know how near we then were to it. He did not then know that I was La Tournoire."

"But there was much talk of La Tournoire on the journey. Did you at any time drop any hint of this place, and how it might be reached?"

"None that could have reached his ears. I told only Mlle. de Varion, and we were quite alone when I did so."

Blaise looked at the ground in silence. After some time he gave a heavy sigh, and, raising his eyes, said:

"Monsieur, I have been thinking of many things of late. Certain matters have had a strange appearance. But, — well, perhaps my thoughts have been absurd, and, in short, I have nothing to say about them except this, monsieur, it is well to be on one's guard always against every one!"

I was about to ask him whether he meant that the boy Pierre had been guilty of eavesdropping and treachery, and to reprove him for that unworthy suspicion, when there was a noise at the gate. Looking thither, I saw two of my men, Sabray and Roquelin, conducting into the courtyard three starved-looking persons, who leaned wearily on one another's shoulders, and seemed ready to drop with fatigue.

"We found these wretches in the woods," explained Sabray. "They are Catholics, although that one tried to hide his cross and shouted, 'Down with the mass!' when we told them to surrender in the name of the Sieur de la Tournoire."

"It is true that I was a Catholic," whined the bedraggled fop who had belonged to De Berquin's

band of four; "but I was just about to abjure when these men came up."

"I will abjure twice over, if it pleases monsieur," put in the tall Spanish-looking ruffian. "Nothing would delight me more than to be a Huguenot. By the windpipe of the Pope, for a flagon of wine I would be a Jew!"

"And I a damned infidel Turk," wearily added their fat comrade, "for a roast fowl, and a place to lay my miserable body!"

At this moment the fop's eyes fell on Blaise.

"Saint Marie!" he cried, falling to his knees. "We are dead men. It is the big fellow we trussed up at the inn!"

"Belly of Beelzebub, so it is!" bellowed Blaise, pulling out his sword. Turning to Jeannotte, who had just reappeared in the courtyard, he roared: "It is now my father's spirit that controls me!"

Whereupon he fell to belaboring the three poor, weary, hungry, thirsty rascals with the flat of his sword, till all of them yelled in concert. They were too limp to resist or even to run, and he had his way with them until Sabray and Roquelin howled with laughter. At last I ordered him to stop, and to confine the men in a chamber, where they should be fed and questioned. So they limped away moaning, driven like cattle by Blaise, who promised them as they went that they should not be put to the trouble

of tying up honest people in the dark for some time to come. Jeannotte followed, out of curiosity, as did Sabray and Roquelin.

Left alone in the courtyard, I sat on the stone bench, which was now in part yellow with moonlight, and began to ponder. I could doubtless learn from the three captives whether De Berquin had had any hand in the coming of La Chatre to Clochonne. Anxious as I was to inform myself, I was yet in no mood to question the men at that moment, preferring to wait and hear the result of Blaise's interrogations.

While I was thinking, my arms folded and my eyes turned to the ground at my feet, I suddenly heard a deep sigh very near me.

I looked up and saw Mademoiselle de Varion standing before me in the moonlight. My gaze met hers, and in the delicious glow that her presence sent through me I forgot all in the world but her.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW DE BERQUIN INVITED DEATH.

"MADEMOISELLE!" I whispered, starting up and taking her hand.

She trembled slightly, and averted her look. But she did not draw away her hand.

"You are still disturbed by Marianne's news," I said. "But you have little more reason to fear when M. de la Chatre is at Clochonne than if he were at the other end of the province."

"Yet I do fear, monsieur," she said, in a low tone, "for your sake."

"Then if you will fear," said I, "I take great happiness in knowing that it is for me. But this is no place or time for fear. Look and listen. The moonlight, the sounds of the forest, the song of the nightingale, all speak of peace."

"The song of the nightingale may give place to the clash of swords and the cries of combat," she replied. "And because you have delayed here with me, you now risk the peril you are in."

"Peril is familiar company to me, mademoiselle," I

said, gaily. "It comes and it goes. It is a very welcome guest when it brings with it the sweetest lady in the world."

Talking thus, I led her around the side of the château to the old garden appertaining to it, a place now wild with all kinds of forest growth, its former use indicated by a broken statue, a crumbling grotto, and in its centre an old sun-dial overgrown with creepers. The path to the sun-dial was again passable, thanks to my frequent visits to the spot since my first arrival at Maury. It was up this path that we now went.

The moonlight and the presence of mademoiselle made the place a very paradise to me. We two were alone in the garden. The moon spread beauty over the broken walls of the château on one side, and the green vegetation around us leaving some places in mysterious shade. The sun-dial was all in light, and so was mademoiselle standing beside it. I breathed sweet wild odors from the garden. From some part of the château came the soft twang of the strings responding to the fingers of the gypsy. I held the soft hand of mademoiselle. I raised it to my lips.

"I love you, I love you!" I whispered.

She made no answer, only looked at me with a kind of mingled grief and joy, bliss embittered by despair.

"It cannot be," I went on, "that Heaven would

permit so great a love to find no response. Will you not answer me, mademoiselle?"

"What answer would you have?" she asked, in a perturbed voice.

"I would have love for love."

Her answer was arrested by the sound of the gypsy's voice, which at that instant rose in an old song, that one in which a woman's love is likened to a light or a fire. These are the first words:

"Bright as the sun, more quick to fade;
Fickle as marsh-lights prove;
Where brightest, casting deepest shade —
False flame of woman's love."

"Heed the song, monsieur," said mademoiselle, in the tone of one who warns vaguely of a danger which dare not be disclosed openly.

"It is an old, old song," I answered. "The raving of some misanthrope of bygone time."

"It has truth in it," she said.

"Nay, he judged all women from some bitter experience of his own. His song ought to have died with him, ought to be shut up in the grave wherein he lies, with his sins and his sorrows."

"Though the man is dead, the truth he sang is not. Heed it, monsieur, as a warning from the dead to the living, a warning to all brave men who unwarily trust in women!"

"I needed no song to warn me, mademoiselle," I

"'I WOULD HAVE LOVE FOR LOVE.'"

said, thinking of Mlle. d'Arency and M. de Noyard. "I have in my own time seen something of the treachery of which some women are capable."

"You have loved other women?" she said, quickly.

"Once I thought I loved one, until I learned what she was."

"What was she?" she asked, slowly, as if divining the answer, and dreading to hear it.

"She was a tool of Catherine de Medici's," said I, speaking with all the more contempt when I compared the guileful court beauty, Mlle. d'Arency, with the pure, sweet woman before me; "one of those creatures whom Catherine called her Flying Squadron, and she betrayed a very honest gentleman to his death."

"Betrayed him!" she repeated.

"Yes, by a pretended love tryst."

Mademoiselle trembled, and held out her hand to the dial for support.

Something in her attitude, something in the pose of her slender figure, something in her white face, her deep, wide-open eyes, so appealed to my love, to my impulse to protect her, that I clasped her in my arms, and drew her close to me. She made no attempt to repulse me, and into her eyes came the look of surrender and yielding.

"Ah, mademoiselle, Julie," I murmured, for she had told me her name, "you do not shrink from me,

your hand clings to mine, the look in your eyes tells what your lips have refused to utter. The truth is out, you love me!"

She closed her eyes, and let me cover her face with kisses.

Presently, still holding her hand in mine, I stepped to the other side of the sun-dial, so that we stood with it between us, our hands clasped over it.

"There needs no oath between us now," said I, "yet here let us vow by the moonlight and the sunlight that mark the time on this old dial. I pledge you here, on the symbol of time, to fidelity forever!"

"False flame of woman's love!"

came the song of the gypsy, before mademoiselle could answer.

The look of unresisting acquiescence faded from her face. She started backward, drew her hand quickly from mine, and with the words, "Oh, monsieur, monsieur!" glided swiftly from the garden and around the château. In perplexity, I followed. When I reached the courtyard she was not there. She had gone in, and to her chamber.

But I was happy. I felt that now she was mine. Her face, her attitude, had spoken, if not her lips. As for her breaking away, I thought that due to a last recurrence of her old scruples concerning the barrier between us. I did not attribute it to the

effect of the sudden intrusion of the gypsy's song. It was by mere accident, I told myself, that her scruples had returned at the moment of that intrusion. What was there in her love that I need fear? She had told me to heed the song as a warning. I considered this a mere device on her part to check the current of my wooing. Her old scruples or her maidenly impulses might cause her to use for that purpose any device that might occur. But, how long she might postpone the final confession of surrender, it must come at last, for the surrender itself was already made. Her heart was mine. What mattered it now though the governor had come to Clochonne solely in quest of me? What though he knew my hiding-place, discovered by the persistent De Berquin, and its location by him communicated through Barbemouche? For, I said to myself, if De Berquin had sent word to the governor, Barbemouche must have been the messenger, for the three rascals now held at Maury could not have been relied on, and they had the appearance of having wandered in the forest several days.

I was just about to summon Blaise, that I might learn the result of his interrogations, when I heard the voice of Maugert, who was lying in watch by the forest path, call out:

"Who goes there?"

"We are friends," came the answer, quickly.

This voice also I knew, as well as Maugert's. It was that of De Berquin.

I ran to the gate and heard him tell Maugert, who covered him with an arquebus, match lighted, that he was seeking the abode of the Sieur de la Tournoire, for whom he had important news.

"Let him come, Maugert!" I called from the gate.

I stepped back into the courtyard. At that moment Blaise came out of the château. Very soon De Berquin strode in through the gateway, followed by the burly Barbemouche. Both looked wayworn and fatigued.

"Monsieur de la Tournoire," said De Berquin, saluting me with fine grace and a pleasant air, — he never lost the ways of a gallant gentleman, — "I have come here to do you a service."

So! thought I, does he really intend to seek my confidence and try to betray me, after all? Admirable self-assurance!

I was about to answer, when Barbemouche put in:

"So you, whom it was in my power to kill a hundred times over that night, are the very Tournoire whom I chased from one end of France to the other eight years ago?" And he looked me over with a frank curiosity.

"Yes," I said, with a smile, "after you had destroyed the home of my fathers. And at last you have found me."

"I was but the servant of the Duke of Guise then," said Barbemouche.

At this point Blaise, who, in all our experiences with De Berquin and his henchmen, had not while sober come within hearing of Barbemouche's voice, or within close sight of him, stepped up and said, coolly:

"Let me see the face that goes with that voice."

And he threw up the front of Barbemouche's hat with one hand, at the same time raising the front of his own with the other. The two men regarded each other for a moment.

"Praise to the God of Israel, we meet again!" cried Blaise, in a loud voice, catching the other by the throat.

"Who are you?" demanded Barbemouche.

"The man on whom you left this mark," — and Blaise pointed to his own forehead, — "in Paris on St. Bartholomew's night thirteen years ago."

"Then I did not kill you?" muttered Barbemouche, glaring fiercely at Blaise.

"God had further use for me," said Blaise.

De Berquin and I both stepped aside, perceiving that here was a matter in which neither of us was concerned. But we looked on with some interest, deferring until its adjustment our own conversation.

"Then it was you who spoiled my appearance for

the rest of my days!" cried Barbemouche. "May you writhe in the flames of hell!"

And, being without sword or other weapon, he aimed a blow of the fist at Blaise's head. Blaise, disdaining to use steel against an unarmed antagonist, contented himself with dodging the blow and dragging Barbemouche to a place where an opening in the courtyard wall overlooked a steep, rocky descent which was for some distance without vegetation. Here the two men grappled. There was some hard squeezing, some quick bending either way, a final powerful forcing forward of the arms on the part of Blaise, a last violent propulsion of the same arms, and Barbemouche was thrown backward down the precipice. Blaise stood for a time looking over. We heard a series of dull concussions, a sound of the flight of detached small stones, and then nothing.

"God giveth the battle to the strong!" said Blaise, and he came away from the precipice.

De Berquin shrugged his shoulders, and turned again to me.

"As I said, monsieur," he began, "I have come here to do you a service."

"Indeed!" said I, coldly, choosing to assume indifference and ignorance. "I knew not that I was in need of any."

"Your need of it is all the greater for that,"

said De Berquin, quietly. "Monsieur, I would hinder some one from doing you a foul deed, though to do so I must rob that person of your esteem."

"Speak clearly, M. de Berquin," said I, thinking that he was taking the wrong way to get my confidence. "It is impossible that any one having my esteem should need hindrance from a foul deed."

De Berquin stood perfectly still and looked me straight in the face, saying:

"Is it a foul deed to betray a man into the hands of his enemies?"

"Yes," said I, thoughtfully, wondering that he should try to begin that very act by accusing some one else of intending it.

"Then, monsieur," he went on, "look to yourself."

But I looked at him instead, with some amazement at the assurance with which he continued to face me.

"And what man of my following would you accuse of intending to betray me?" I asked.

"No man, monsieur," he said, still meeting my gaze steadily, and not changing his attitude.

"No man?" I repeated, for a moment puzzled. "Oh, ho! The boy, Pierre, perhaps, who left us while we were at the inn by the forest road! Well, monsieur, you speak falsely. I would stake my arm on his loyalty."

"It is not to tell you of any boy that I have sought you these many days in this wilderness," said De Berquin, all the time standing as motionless as a statue, and speaking in a very low voice. "It is not a boy that has come from M. de la Chatre, the governor of the province, to betray you."

"Not man nor boy," I said, curious now to learn what he was aiming at. "What, then? Mademoiselle's maid, honest Jeannotte? You must take the trouble to invent something else, M. de Berquin. You become amusing."

"Not the maid, monsieur," he replied, very quietly, putting a stress on the word "maid," and facing me as boldly as ever.

Slowly it dawned on me what he meant. Slowly a tremendous indignation grew in me against the man who dared to stand before me and make that accusation. Yet I controlled myself, and merely answered in a tone as low as his, but slowly drawing my sword:

"By God, you mean *her!*"

"Mlle. de Varion," he answered, never quailing.

Filled with a great wrath, my powers of thought for the time paralyzed, my mind capable of no perception, but that of mademoiselle's sweetness and purity opposed to this horrible charge of black treason, I could answer only:

"Then the devil is no more the king of liars,

unless you are the devil! Come, Monsieur de Berquin, I will show you what I think of the service you would do me!"

With drawn sword in hand, I walked across the courtyard and pointed to the way leading around the side of the château to an open space in one part of the garden. I knew that there we should not be interrupted.

As I waited for De Berquin to precede me, I chanced to look at Blaise. A strange, thoughtful expression was on his face. He, too, stood quite still.

De Berquin looked at my face for a moment longer, then seemed to realize the hopelessness of his attempt to make me credit his accusation, shrugged his shoulders and said, courteously:

"As you will, monsieur!"

And he walked before me around the side of the château to the bare space in the garden. Blaise, having received no orders, did not presume to follow.

We took off our doublets and other encumbrances, De Berquin raising his sheathed sword and very gracefully unsheathing by throwing the scabbard off into the air, so that it fell some distance away in the garden.

Twice before that night it had been shown that I was the more skilful swordsman, yet now he stood

without the least sign of fear. If he had formerly retreated, on being disarmed, it was from situations in which he had figured ridiculously, and could not endure to remain before Mademoiselle de Varion. Also, he had sought to preserve his life, so that he might have revenge. But now that events had taken their turn, he showed himself not afraid to face death.

"It is a pity," I said, "that a brave man should be so great a liar."

"Rather," he said, "that so brave a man" — and his look showed that he alluded to me — "should be so easily fooled; and that so fair a woman should be so vile a traitor."

And, seeing that I was ready, he put himself into a posture of defence.

The cup of my resentment having been already filled to overflowing, it was impossible for me to be further angered by this. But there came on me a desire to let him know that I was not as ill-informed as he had thought me; that perhaps he was the greater fool. So, holding my sword lowered, I said:

"You should know, monsieur, that I am aware who undertook the task of betraying me to La Chatre."

"And yet you say that I lie," he replied.

"I know even how the matter was to be con-

ducted," I went on. "The spy was first to learn my place of refuge and send the information to La Chatre. The governor was then to come to Clochonne. The governor is already at Clochonne. The spy, doubtless, learned where I hid, and sent word to La Chatre."

"Doubtless," he replied, impassively, "inasmuch as you speak of one of mademoiselle's boys having left you. He was probably the messenger."

"Monsieur," I said, "you desire to leave a slander of mademoiselle that may afflict me or her after your death; but your quickness to perceive circumstances that seemingly fit your lie will not avail you. A thousand facts might seem to bear out your falsehood, yet I would not heed them. I would know them to be accidental. For every lie there are many circumstances that may be turned to its support. So do not, in dying, felicitate yourself on leaving behind you a lie that will live to injure her or me. Your lie shall die with you."

"You tire me with reiterations, monsieur," he replied, calmly. "Since you will maintain that I have lied, do so. It is you who will suffer for your blindness, not I. I told you the truth, not really because I wished to do you a kindness, but because there was a chance of its serving my own purpose. The woman came here to find your hiding-place, and betray you to the governor. La Chatre

engaged her to do so. His secretary, Montignac, took it into his head that he would like to become sole possessor of mademoiselle's time and attractions. But he could not undo the governor's plans, nor could he hope for the woman's coöperation, as she seems to have taken a dislike to him. It had been agreed that, when she had turned you over to the governor's soldiers, she should go to Fleurier to receive her reward. She had made this condition so that she might keep out of the way of Montignac. Now he dared not interfere to prevent her from doing the governor's errand, but he hoped to see more of her after that should be completed. Such, as it was necessary for him to tell me, was the state of his mind when I came along — I, ordered from court, hounded from Paris by creditors, ragged and ready for what might turn up. Near Fleurier Montignac turned up, in La Chatre's cavalcade. He wanted me to become the woman's escort to Clochonne, keep my eyes on her, know when she had settled your business, and, when she was about to start for Fleurier, keep her as his guest in a house that I was to hire in Clochonne. But why do I grow chilly telling you all this, when you do not intend to believe me? Shall we not begin, monsieur?"

"Doubtless you are vain of your skill at fabrication, monsieur," I said, wishing to deprive him of

the satisfaction of thinking me deceived by his story, "but you have no reason to be. That a woman should be sent to betray an outlaw, and then a man sent to keep her in view and finally hold her, — it is complicated, to say the least. Why should you not have been sent to take me?" I thought that I had touched him here.

"That is what I asked Montignac," he replied. "But he told me that she had already been commissioned to hunt you down, before he had made up his mind to possess her by force. Moreover, it would not do to disturb the governor's plan, on which the governor was mightily set, though Montignac himself had suggested it. 'And,' said Montignac, 'you have not a woman's wit to find his hiding-place, or a woman's means of luring him from his men.' And yet, you will remember that when I thought you were a lackey, and you offered to deliver La Tournoire to me, I grasped at the chance, for I knew that, however set the governor might be on having the lady take you, he would be glad enough to have you taken by any one, and if I took you and got the reward I could afford to bear Montignac's displeasure. I think Montignac's desire to have the lady take you was due to his having suggested the plan. He wanted both the credit of having devised your capture and the pleasure of mademoiselle's society. Yes, when you held out to me the possibility, I was willing to

risk Montignac's resentment and take La Tournoire myself. Before that, I had confined myself to the task of following mademoiselle. At first you and your supposed master were in my way. I had hoped to get her from you, and to obtain her esteem by the mock rescue, but this was spoiled first by my men and then by you. After that failure, I could merely follow and hope that chance would enable me to do Montignac's will."

"You cleverly mix truth and fiction, monsieur," I said. "You interest me. Go on."

It is true that he did interest me, so ingenious did I think his recital.

"I have no wish to prolong the life of one of us by this talk," he replied, "but a tale once begun should be finished. You know how you promised to deliver up La Tournoire to me. I grant that you kept the promise to the letter. During the rest of that night I lay quiet with my men. We heard your departure the next morning, and when the way was clear we followed in your track. We could do so quietly, for we were afoot; we had left our horses in another part of this wilderness the day before. We heard you greeted by your sentinel, and guessed that you were near your burrow. We came no further, but looked around and found a projecting rock, under which to lie hidden, and a tree from whose top this place could be seen. So we have lodged under the

rock, one of us keeping watch night and day from the tree. I hoped thus to be able to know when you should be taken, so that I might then look to the lady. But no soldiers came for you, neither you nor the lady departed from the place, no sign came to indicate an attack or a flight. You can imagine, monsieur, how a gentleman accustomed to court pleasures and Parisian fare enjoyed the kind of life that we have been leading for these several days. Now and then one of us would crawl forth to a stream for water, or forage for nuts and berries, and we snared a few birds, which we had to eat raw, not daring to make a fire. This existence became tiresome. This afternoon three of my knaves deserted. What was I to do? It was useless to go back to Montignac without having done his work. To stay there awaiting your capture or the lady's departure was perhaps to starve. To go any distance from this place was to lose sight of the woman, who might leave at any time, and we could not know what direction she might take. The enterprise had been at best a scurvy one, fit only for a man at the end of his resources. In fine, monsieur, when the last of my men threatened to follow his comrades, I crawled out of my hole, stretched my aching bones, and resolved to let Montignac's business go to the devil. There was no chance for me in the service of the French King, therefore I came to offer myself as a member

of your company. In the Huguenot cause I might earn back some of the good things of life. It no longer matters on which side I fight. 'Twas the same with Barbemouche. And, inasmuch as I had decided to cast in my fortunes with yours, I naturally wished you well. Thus it was my own interest I sought to serve, as well as yours, when I told you that this woman came here to betray you to La Chatre."

"You told me that," said I, calmly, "for one or both of two purposes, — the first, to make me withdraw my protection from the lady, in order that she might be at your disposal; the second, to get my confidence, in order that you yourself might betray me to La Chatre."

De Berquin laughed. "Am I, then, such a fool as to think that the wary Tournoire could be put off his guard by a man? No, no. The governor or Montignac was wise in choosing a woman for that delicate task. It is only by a Delilah that a Samson can be caught!"

"Monsieur," I said, with ironical admiration, "you are indeed as artful in your lies as you are bold. You have constructed a story that every circumstance seems to bear out. Yet one circumstance you have forgotten, or you are not aware of it. It destroys your whole edifice. The father of Mlle. de Varion is now a prisoner, held by the governor's

order, on a charge of treason for having harbored Huguenots. Would his daughter undertake to do the work of a spy and a traitor for that governor against a Huguenot? Now for your ingenuity, monsieur!"

"Such things have been known," he answered, not at all discomfited. "His daughter may not have her father's weakness for Huguenots, and if she bears resentment against the governor on her father's account, her desire of the reward may outweigh that resentment. Covetousness is strong in women. You would not expect great filial devotion in a hired spy and traitress. Moreover, for all I know, this woman may not be Mlle. de Varion, although Montignac so named her to me. She may have assumed that character at his suggestion, in order to get your confidence and sympathy, not daring to pretend to be a Huguenot lest some habitual act might betray the deception."

"Enough, M. de Berquin," I said. "I do your wit the credit of admitting that so well-wrought a lie was never before told. Only two things prevent its being believed. It is to me that you tell it, and it is of Mlle. de Varion! You complained a while ago of being chilly. Let us now warm ourselves!"

And so we went at it. I had no reason now to repeat the trick by which I had before disarmed him. Indeed, I wished him to keep sword in hand

that I might have no scruples about killing him. I never could bring myself to give the death thrust to an unarmed man. Yet I was determined that the brain whence had sprung so horrible a story against my beloved should invent no more, that the lips which had uttered the accusation should not speak again. Yet he gave me a hard fight. It was for his life that he now wielded sword, and he was not now taken by surprise as he had been in our former meetings, or unsteadied by a desire of making a great flourish before a lady. He now brought to his use all his training as a fencer. He had a strong wrist and a good eye, despite the dissolute life that he had led. For some minutes our swords clashed, our boots beat the ground, and our lungs panted as we fought in the moonlight. I was anxious to have the thing over quickly, lest the noise we made might reach the ears of mademoiselle, and perhaps bring her to the scene. I knew that Blaise would keep the men away, but he would not presume to restrain mademoiselle. I wished, too, to have the thrust made before my antagonist should begin to show weakness of body or uncertainty of eye. But he maintained a good guard, and also required me to give much time and attention to my own defence. Indeed, his point once passed through my shirt under my left shoulder, my left arm being then raised. But at last I caught him between two

ribs as he was coming forward, and it was almost as though he had fallen on my sword. I missed his own sword only by quickly turning sidewise so that his weapon ran along the front of my breast without touching me.

He uttered one shriek, I drew my sword out of his body, and he fell in a limp heap. With a convulsive motion he straightened out and was still. I turned his body so that his face was towards the sky, and I went back to the courtyard, leaving him alone in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XIV.

"GOD GRANT I DO NOT FIND YOU FALSE!"

In the courtyard was mademoiselle, very pale and agitated, standing by Blaise and grasping his arm as if for support. She still had on the gown of pale green that she had worn earlier in the evening. Her head was uncovered, her hair in some disorder, and this, with the pallor of her face and the fright in her wide-open eyes, gave her some wildness of appearance. It was De Berquin's piercing death-cry that had blanched her cheek and made her clutch Blaise's arm.

"You have killed him!" she said, in a voice little above a whisper.

"You ought not to be here, mademoiselle," I replied.

"From my chamber window I saw you talking with M. de Berquin. What he said I know not, but you drew your sword and went away with him. I waited for a long time in anxiety until I heard the sound of swords. I came down, and would have gone to beg you to stop, but when I heard that

awful shriek I could not go any further. Oh, monsieur, you have killed him!"

"He brought it on himself, mademoiselle," was all that I could say.

And here Blaise did what I thought a strange and presumptuous thing. He approached mademoiselle, and, looking her keenly in the eyes, said, gravely:

"He said that you came from the governor of the province to betray M. de la Tournoire!"

"Blaise!" I cried, in great astonishment and anger. "How dare you even utter the calumny he spoke? Go you and look to the disposal of his body." And I motioned him away with a wrathful gesture.

He looked frowningly at mademoiselle and then at me, and went off, with a shrug of his shoulders, to the place where De Berquin lay.

I turned to mademoiselle; she stood like a statue, her eyes fixed on the empty air before her. Yet she seemed to know when my look fell on her, for at that instant a slight tremor passed through her.

"Tremble not for M. de Berquin, mademoiselle," said I, thinking of that divine gentleness in a woman which makes her pity even those who have persecuted her. "Indeed, he must have wished to die. He well knew that a certain way to death was to tempt my sword with a black lie of the truest lady in France."

"You killed him," she murmured, in a low, pitying voice, "because he said — I came from the governor — to betray you!"

"Why else, mademoiselle? What is the matter? Why do you look so?"

For all life and consciousness seemed to be about to leave her countenance.

"*Mon dieu!*" she said, weakly, "I cannot tell — I —"

I hastened to put my arms about her, that she might not fall.

"You pity him," I said, "but there could be nothing of good in one who could so slander you. Indeed, mademoiselle, you are ill. Let me lead you in. Believe me, mademoiselle, he well deserved his death."

Thus endeavoring to calm and restore her mind, I led her slowly into the château and up the steps to the door of her chamber. She followed as one without will and with little strength. Hugo and Jeannotte, who had been sitting on the landing outside her door, had risen as we came up the stairs. When I took my arms from about mademoiselle, she leaned on the maid's shoulder, and so passed into her chamber, giving me neither look nor word. Leaving Hugo to keep his vigil outside her door, I went down to the great hall of the château.

Several of the men lay on the floor, most of them

asleep. I asked one of them where Blaise had bestowed the three rascals who had become our prisoners, and he rose and led the way to a dark chamber at the rear of the hall. He took a torch that was stuck in the wall and followed me into this chamber. It was my desire to learn from these men whether or not Barbemouche, or one of them, had borne to M. de la Chatre an account of my hiding-place; for there had been time for one to have done so and returned. It might be that the original plan suggested to the governor by Montignac had been altered and that some other step had been adopted for my capture. The very visit of De Berquin, the very story he had told me, might have been connected with this other step. One of his purposes, in trying to make me think myself betrayed, may have been to induce me to leave a place so inaccessible to attack. If a new plan had been put in operation, these men might know something of it. I would question them and then consult with Blaise, comparing the answers they should give me with those they had given Blaise.

They lay snoring, their hands fastened behind their backs, their ankles so tied that they could not stretch out their legs. The man with me said that Blaise, after belaboring them and interrogating them to his heart's content, had relented, and brought some cold meat and wine for them. I suppose that the gentle

spirit of his mother had obtained the ascendency. They had devoured the food with the avidity of starving dogs, and had lain down, full of gratitude, to sleep. Blaise had then bound them up as a precaution against a too unceremonious departure. I woke them one after another, with gentle kicks, and they stared up at me, blinking in the torchlight. Submissively and readily, though drowsily, they answered my questions. They swore that neither Barbemouche nor any one of them, nor De Berquin himself, had borne any message to the governor; that the five had remained together from the first, living under the rock and keeping watch from the tree-top, as De Berquin had narrated, until the previous afternoon, when the three had deserted, only to fall into the hands of our sentinel. In every detail their account agreed with that of their late master. When I accused them of telling a prearranged lie, and threatened them with the torture, the foppish fellow said:

"What more can a man tell than the truth? But if you're not satisfied with it, monsieur, and let me know what you wish me to say, I'll say it with all my heart, and swear to it on whatever you name."

From the faces of the others, I knew that they, too, were willing to tell anything, true or false, to avoid torture, and so I could not but believe their story. Therefore, said I to myself, Montignac's plan was not adhered to. De Berquin sent no one to the

governor with information concerning my hiding-place. La Chatre had come to Clochonne without having awaited such information. De Berquin had been too slow. Perhaps, indeed, the plan had been altered so as to omit the sending of this preliminary word to the governor. A fixed time might have been set for the coming of the governor to Clochonne. De Berquin had probably retained his men that he might have one to use as messenger to the governor, in notifying La Chatre where to place his ambuscade, and that he might have others to waylay mademoiselle. His lie was doubtless a bold device to put mademoiselle into his power, and to get entrance to my company. It was a last resource, it was just as likely to bring death as to bring success, but he had taken a gambler's chances. They had gone against him, and he had uncomplainingly accepted his defeat.

So the governor's presence at Clochonne was not to be taken as reason for great alarm, inasmuch as there seemed now no probability that he knew my hiding-place. We were still safe at Maury. We should have only to maintain greater vigilance. Failing to hear from his agent, who now lay dead in the garden at Maury, and could never work us harm, the governor would eventually take new measures for my capture, or, if I kept quiet and my men left no traces, he would presently suppose that I had gone from his province. As for mademoiselle, neither La Chatre

nor Montignac knew where she was. We might, therefore, have more of those delightful, peaceful days at Maury. Moreover, what better time to surprise the commandant of the Château of Fleurier than while La Chatre was at Clochonne? My heart beat gaily at thought of how bright was the prospect. I passed out by a back way to the garden, where Blaise had been looking to the body of De Berquin.

My late antagonist lay in peace and order, Blaise having replaced his doublet on him and put his sword by his side.

"A handsome gentleman," said Blaise, quietly, looking down at the body.

"But a fool as well as a liar," said I. "How could he think that such a story was to be swallowed? To have thrown him into confusion, I should have told him that I had overheard the plan for my capture, that I knew of an attempt to be made to get me from my men, that mademoiselle has never made any such attempt either by tryst or summons or on any pretext whatever."

"Neither has De Berquin," answered Blaise, sullenly, "and yet you think he was the spy whom the governor sent."

"He had no opportunity," I replied, rather sharply, annoyed at Blaise's manner. "He did not dare come here until he had formed a desperate plan on which to hazard everything."

"As for mademoiselle's having had the opportunity and yet not having done so," Blaise went on, with a kind of doggedness, "the spy was not to plan the ambush until the governor should arrive at Clochonne."

"By God!" I cried. "Do you dare hint that you credit this villain's lie for a moment?" In my exasperation I half drew my sword.

"I credit nothing and discredit nothing," he said, in a low but stubborn tone, "but I place no one above doubt, except God and you. I have had my thoughts, monsieur, and have them still. It is enough, as yet, to keep all eyes open and turned in many directions."

"You cur! You dare to suspect —" Without finishing the sentence, I struck him across the face with the back of my hand.

He drew a deep breath, but made no movement.

"I shall not trouble myself to suspect," he went on, with no change of tone, "until we know that M. de la Chatre is at Clochonne, —"

"We know that already," I broke in, hotly. "Marianne brought the news this afternoon."

"Until we know that mademoiselle knows it," he went on.

"We know that, too," I said. "She heard Marianne tell me."

"Until her other servant happens to be missing,

and some occasion arises through her for your going somewhere without your men. For example, if she should go for a walk in the forest with her maid, and presently the maid should return with word that mademoiselle lay mortally hurt somewhere — "

"I would go to her at once!" I cried, involuntarily.

"So mademoiselle would suppose. You would not wait for your men to arm and accompany you. You would hasten to the place, without precaution, never thinking that mademoiselle's servant might have carried word to La Chatre, a day before, to have men waiting for you. Kill me if you like, monsieur! I cannot avoid my thoughts. They are at your service as my hand and sword are. I may be all wrong, but one cannot fathom women. You used to speak of a lady of Catherine de Medici's — "

Ah, considered I, it is the thought of Mlle. d'Arency's deed that has awakened these foolish suspicions in Blaise's mind! I had given him some account of how that lady had, by a love tryst, drawn poor De Noyard to his death. He was incapable of discriminating between women. He could not see that Mlle. de Varion was of a kind of woman as unlike the court intriguer as if the two belonged to different species of beings. Ought one to expect delicacy of perception from a common soldier? His suspiciousness arose partly from his devotion to me.

So, much as I adored mademoiselle and held her sacred and above the slightest breath of accusation, I regretted the blow I had given him, and which he had received so meekly.

"I see, Blaise, what is in your head," I said, "but there are matters of which you cannot judge. No more of this talk, therefore. And I require of you the greatest respect and devotion to mademoiselle."

"Very well, monsieur," he said. "Let me say but this: You remember my forebodings the last time we rode through the province. Because we came back alive, you thought there was nothing in them. Perhaps there was nothing. Only I have been thinking that out of that last journey may yet come our destruction. My premonition may have been right, after all."

I smiled and walked back to the courtyard and sat down on the bench, no longer angry at either De Berquin or Blaise, and calm in the thought that there seemed no immediate danger. If I could but communicate my sense of security to mademoiselle! If I might see a smile on her face, if the look of yielding would but come back there and remain! Surely her scruples would pass when I should bring her father to her. What imaginary barrier could stand before the combined forces of love and gratitude? The rescue of her father must not be longer deferred. I must form my plan immediately. Yet

I continued to waste time thinking of the future, of the day when she should acknowledge herself mine. I took off my hat and removed from it the glove that she had given me. It was like a part of her; it was fashioned by use to the very form of her hand. I pressed it to my lips and then looked up at the window of her chamber.

"Ah, Mlle. Julie," I said, "I know that you love me. You will be mine; something in the moonlight, in the murmurs of the trees, in the song of the nightingale, tells me so. How beautiful is the world! I am too happy!"

I heard rapid footsteps from outside the gate, and presently one of my men ran into the courtyard from the forest. It was Frojac, who had been all day in Clochonne in search of information. Seeing me, he stopped and stood still, out of breath from his run.

At the same moment Blaise came from the garden and stood beside the bench, curious to hear Frojac's news.

"Ah, Frojac!" said I. "From Clochonne? I know your news already. M. de la Chatre is there."

And I motioned to him to speak quietly, lest his news, which might be alarming, should reach the ears of mademoiselle through her chamber window.

"I had a talk with one of his men," said Frojac, "an old comrade of mine, who did not guess that I

was of your troop. I told him that I had given up fighting and settled down as a poacher. He says that it is well known to the governor's soldiers that the governor has come south to catch you. He declares that the governor knows the exact location of your hiding-place."

"Soldiers' gabble," said I.

"But my old comrade is no fool," went on Frojac. "I pretended to laugh at him for thinking that any one could find out the burrow of La Tournoire, and as we were drinking he got angry and swore that he spoke truly. He said that the governor had got word of your hiding-place from a boy. If you knew my comrade, monsieur, you would know that what he says is to be heeded. He is one who talks little, but keeps his ears and eyes open."

"Word from a boy?" I repeated, rather to myself. "Could De Berquin have found some peasant boy and despatched him to the governor?"

"My comrade says that the boy was sent by a woman," said Frojac.

"A woman!" I cried. "If it be true, then, malediction on her! Some covetous, spying wife of a farmer has found us out, perchance!"

"Perchance, monsieur! But, all the same, I and Maugert, who was on guard yonder by the path, took the liberty just now of stopping the boy of mademoiselle, your guest, as he was riding off. In

advance of him rode a woman. I had just come up the path and had stopped for a word with Maugert. Suddenly the woman dashed by and was gone in an instant. Neither of us had time to make up our minds whether to stop her or not, for she came from this place, not towards it. By the time when we had decided that we ought to have detained her, she was out of hearing. But then came a second horse, and that we stopped. The rider was the boy Hugo."

"An unknown woman departing from our very camp!" I said, rising. "The gypsy girl!" But at that instant the gypsy girl, Giralda, came in through the gateway with an armful of herbs that she had been gathering just outside the walls. She often plucked herbs after dark, as there are some whose potency is believed to be the greater for their being uprooted at night. "Ah, no, no, no!" I cried, repenting my unjust suspicion. "A woman hidden at Maury! She shall be followed and caught and treated like any cur of a papegot spy, man or woman!" I was wild with rage to think that our hiding-place might really have been discovered, my guards eluded, the presence of mademoiselle perhaps reported to Montignac, her safety and ours put in immediate peril, by some one who had contrived to find concealment under our very eyes! "And the boy Hugo riding off by night!" I added. "Had this woman corrupted him, I wonder? Was it

through him that she obtained entrance and concealment? Where is he?"

I could at that moment have believed the most incredible things, even that a woman had hidden herself in one of the ruined outbuildings; for what could have been more incredible than Frojac's account of an unknown woman riding from the château at the utmost speed?

"Maugert is bringing him to you," said Frojac. "I ran ahead to apprise you of what had occurred."

"These are astounding things," I said, turning to Blaise. "Who can tell now how much the governor knows or what he may intend? We may be attacked at any time. And half our men away! Perhaps the governor knows that, too. If not, this woman may tell him. We shall have to flee at once across the mountains. Mademoiselle is now well enough to endure the journey. I must tell her to make ready for flight."

I looked up at mademoiselle's window, and took a step towards it; but at that moment Maugert came into the courtyard, leading Hugo, whom he held by the arm with a grip of iron. The horse had been left outside.

"My boy, what is this?" I cried, not hiding my anger. "You would ride away secretly, and without permission of your mistress?"

"It was my duty, when I followed to protect her,"

the boy said. "Mlle. de Varion was mad, I think, to go alone at this hour."

"Mademoiselle?" I echoed, in great mystification. "Alone? Whither?"

"To Clochonne, to M. de la Chatre," was the reply.

It took away from me for a moment the very power of speech. I stared at the boy in dumb amazement.

"Clochonne! La Chatre! Mademoiselle!" I murmured, questioningly, my faculty of comprehension being for the instant dazed. "How do you know, boy?"

"She said so when she left this courtyard to take horse," the boy replied. "When I asked her whither she was bound, she said to Clochonne to see M. de la Chatre, and she spoke of some mission, but I could not hear the words exactly, for she was in great excitement. She then made off, declaring she would go alone, but it was my duty, nevertheless, to follow and guard her."

"Mademoiselle gone to Clochonne, to La Chatre," I repeated, as one in a dream.

At that instant there came again from somewhere in the château the voice of the gypsy in the song,

"False flame of woman's love!"

"The devil!" muttered Blaise. "Was De Berquin right?" And he ran into the château.

"The woman who told our hiding-place!" said Frojac.

Could it be? Was she another Mademoiselle d'Arency? Had she thought that, after De Berquin's accusation, any attempt on her part to draw me from my men would convict her in my eyes; that indeed I might come at any moment to believe in the treachery of which he had warned me? Had this thought driven her to Clochonne, where she might be safe from my avenging wrath, where also she might advise the governor to attack me at once? She had spoken to the boy of a mission. There had, then, been a mission, and it had to do with herself and the governor! As this horrible idea filled my mind, I felt a kind of sinking, and as if the very earth trembled beneath me. But then I thought of mademoiselle's sweet face, and I hurled the dark thought from me, amazed that I could have held it for an instant.

"It is not true!" I cried, loudly. "By God, it is not true! I'll not believe it! She has not gone! She is in her chamber yonder!" And I went and stood beneath her window. "Mademoiselle! Come to the window! Tell us that the boy lies or is deluded! Mademoiselle, I say!"

But no face appeared at the window — that window up to which I had looked a few moments before while I sat on the bench, thinking that my love was behind it.

And now Blaise came running out of the château. He stopped on the steps.

"She is not there," he said. "I found only the maid, wailing out prayers to a Catholic saint!"

So she was really gone — gone! She must have left while I was interrogating De Berquin's three henchmen in their cell or while I had stood with Blaise in the garden, reproving him for his suspicions of her.

"And because he assailed her loyalty I killed that man!" I said aloud, forgetful, for the time, of the presence of Blaise and Frojac, Maugert, Hugo, and the gypsy girl. All these stood in silence, not knowing what to do or say, awaiting some order or sign from me.

"She is a woman, monsieur!" said Blaise, gently, as if he thought to please me by offering some excuse for her conduct, or for my having been so deceived in her.

And then again I saw her pure, pale face, her full, moist eyes, her slender, girlish figure. Let the evidence be what it might, it was impossible for me to see her in my mind and conceive her to be treacherous. There must be some other thing accounting for all these strange circumstances. She could not be a spy, a hired traitress! A glad thought came to me. She might have thought that her presence added to my danger, that I would refuse to leave Maury while she continued weak, that I

might thus through her be caught, that her departure would leave me no reason for further delay. It was a wild thought, but it was within possibility, so I took it in and clung to it. At such a time how does a man welcome the least surmise that agrees with his wishes or checks his fears!

"She is a woman, monsieur!" Blaise had said, even while this thought burst upon me.

"So much the worse for any man that dare accuse her!" I cried. "She is the victim of some devilish seeming! My armor, Maugert! Frojac, to horse! You and I ride at once! Blaise, marshal the men, and follow when you can, by the forest path!"

"Ah!" cried Blaise, overjoyed. "To Guienne, to join Henri of Navarre?"

"No!" I answered. "To Clochonne, to join mademoiselle!"

Maugert obediently and hastily brought me my breast-piece, and began to adjust it to my body. I already had my sword. Frojac had started for the stables, but at my answer to Blaise he stopped and looked at me in astonishment.

It was thus with me: Mademoiselle had gone. The presence that had made Maury a paradise to me was no longer there. The place was now intolerable. I could not exist away from mademoiselle. Where she was not, life to me was torture. Guilty or inno-

cent, she gave the world all the charm it had for me. Traitress or true, she drew me to her. If she were innocent, she imperilled herself. In any event, if she went to Clochonne she put herself in the power of Montignac. The thought of that was maddening to me. I must find her, whatever the risk. Perhaps I could catch her before she reached Clochonne. If I ran into danger, I should presently have Blaise and the men to help me out; but I could not wait for them to arm. Every minute of delay was galling. Into what might she fall? Whatever she be, good or bad, angel or fiend, I must see her — see her!

Blaise stood looking at me with open mouth.

"She will prove her honesty, my life upon it!" I said.

"You are mad!" cried Blaise. "She will reach the château of Clochonne long before you do!"

"Then I shall enter the château!" I answered, helping Maugert buckle on my armor.

"And meet the governor and garrison!" said Blaise.

"They will rejoice to see me!"

"'Tis rushing into the lion's den, monsieur!" put in Frojac.

"Let the lion look to himself," said I, standing forth at last, all armed and ready.

Frojac ran to get the horses.

"They would not let you see her!" cried Blaise, stubbornly standing in my way. "You would go straight to death for nothing! My captain, you shall not!"

And, as I started towards the stables to mount, he lay hands on me to hold me back, and Maugert, too, caught me by one of the arms.

"Out of my way, rebels!" I cried, vehemently, struggling to free myself from them. "I shall see her to-night though I have to beat down every sword in France and force the very gates of hell!"

I threw them both from me so violently that neither dared touch me again. As I stepped forward I saw on the ground at my feet the glove that mademoiselle had given me, and which I had been caressing while sitting alone in the courtyard. I must have dropped it on hearing Frojac's news. I now stopped and picked it up. 'Twas all that was left with me of mademoiselle. She had worn it, it had the form of her hand. I held it in my fingers and looked at it. Again came the song of the gypsy,

"False flame of woman's love!"

I pressed the glove again and again to my lips, tears gushed from my eyes, and I murmured: "Ah, mademoiselle, God grant I do not find you false!"

Five minutes later, Frojac and I were speeding our horses over the forest path towards Clochonne.

CHAPTER XV.

TO CLOCHONNE, AFTER MADEMOISELLE!

On through the forest, on over the narrow path, the horse seeming to feel my own impatience, his hoofs crushing the fallen twigs and the vegetation that lay in the way, the branches of the trees striking me in forehead and eyes, my heart on fire, my mind a turmoil, on to learn the truth, on to see her! The moon was now overhead, and here and there it lighted up the path. Close behind me came Frojac. I heard the footfalls and the breathing of his horse.

Would we come up to her before she reached Clochonne? This depended on the length of start she had. She would lose some time, perhaps, through being less familiar with the road than we were, yet wherever the road lay straight before her she would force her horse to its utmost, guessing that her departure would be discovered and herself pursued.

My mind inclined this way and that as I rode. Now I saw how strong was the evidence against her, yet I refused to be convinced by it before I should

hear what she might have to say. Now I conjured up her image before me, and then all the evidence was naught. It was impossible that this face, of all faces in the world, could have been a mask to conceal falsehood and treachery, that this voice could have lied in its sweet and sorrowful tones, that her appearance of grief could have been but a pretence, that her seemingly unconscious signs of love could have been simulation!

Yet had not the gypsy sung of the false flame of woman's love? It is true, she had bade me heed these words. Would she have done so had her own appearance of love been false? Perhaps it was this very thought, the very improbability of a false woman's warning a man against woman's treachery, that had made her do so, that I might the less readily on occasion believe her false. Who can tell the resources and devices of a subtle woman?

What? Was I doubting her? Was I believing the story? Was I, with my closer knowledge of her, with my experience of the freaks of circumstance, with my perception of her heart, to accept the first apparent deduction from the few facts at hand, as blind, unthinking, undiscriminating soldiers, Blaise and Frojac, had done? Did I not know of what kind of woman she was? She was no Mlle. d'Arency.

Yet, who knows but that poor De Noyard had believed Mlle. d'Arency true? Might he not, with the

eyes of love, have seen in her as pure and spotless a creature as I had seen in Mlle. de Varion? Do the eyes of love, then, deceive? Is the confidence of lovers never to be relied on?

But I must have read her heart aright. Surely her heart had spoken to mine. Surely its voice was that of truth. Surely I knew her. Were not her eyes to be believed. Were not truth, goodness, gentleness, love, written on her face?

Yet, how went the gypsy's song, — the one we had heard him sing at Godeau's inn, by the forest road?

"But, ah, the sadness of the day
When woman shows her treason!
And, oh, the price we have to pay
For joys that have their season!
Her look of love is but a mask
For plots that she is weaving.
Alas, for those who fondly bask
In smiles that are deceiving!"

Might this, then, be true of any woman? So many men had found it out. The eyes of so many had been opened at last. Was I still a fool, had I learned so little of women, had my experience with Mlle. d'Arency taught me only to beware of women outwardly like her, did I need a separate lesson for each different woman on whom I might set my heart? Was it my peculiar lot to be twice deceived in the same way?

And yet, how her eyes had moistened in dwelling on mine, how they had dropped before my look, how she had yielded to my embrace, how she had stood still and unresisting in my arms! No, no, they were wrong! De Berquin had lied, Blaise and Frojac were stolid fools, capable of making only the most obvious inference, and I was a contemptible wretch to falter in my faith in her for an instant! She was the victim of a set of circumstances. She had reason for her hasty departure, she would make all clear in a few words. On, on, my horse, that I may hear those words, that my heart may rejoice! How soon shall we come up to her? How far ahead is she? How near to Clochonne? On! She is true, I know it. On! It may be even for my sake that she is endangering herself. On, that I may be at her side to shield her! On, for of late I have passed all the hours of the day with her, all the nights near her, her presence has been the breath of life to me, it is a new and unwonted and intolerable thing to be away from her, and I madly thirst and hunger for the sight of her! On, good horse!

Yet, torturing thought, how the story explained all that had seemed strange! How it fitted so many facts! At the inn at Fleurier we had overheard the plan suggested by Montignac for my capture, the employment of a spy who was to find my hiding place, send word of it, then plan an ambush for me.

Then the lady had come to the inn. Perhaps she was one who had already some kind of relations with the governor and had now come purposely to meet him. What had passed between her and the governor we had not overheard. It might easily have been the proposal by him, and the acceptance by her, of the mission against me. Such a task might better be entrusted to a woman. Catherine herself had employed women to entrap men who would have been on their guard against men. Certain Huguenot gentlemen had been especially susceptible to the charms of her accomplished decoys. Then the governor and his secretary had gone, and the latter had reappeared with De Berquin. It might really be that this woman, whether she were Mlle. de Varion, or whether she merely took that name in order to get my confidence without having to make the risky pretence of being a Protestant, was desired by Montignac and yet disliked him, and that De Berquin had been hired indeed to hold her forcibly for the secretary after she had accomplished her mission. But her ingenuous signs of a tender feeling for me? A device to blind me and win my trust, and so, through me, get the confidence of my supposed friend, La Tournoire. Her grief on the journey? Mere pretence, in order to bear out her story and enlist my sympathy. Her periods of silence and meditation? She was thinking out the details of

her plot. Her questions about La Tournoire? A means of learning what manner of man she would have to deal with, and of finding out his hiding-place at a time when it would be easiest to despatch her boy with a description of it to the governor. Her desire to know how great was my friendship for La Tournoire? This arose perhaps from a thought that I might be won over to her purpose, perhaps from a fear that I might some day avenge his betrayal. The barrier that, she said, lay between us? A pretext to get rid of me as soon as I might be, not only useless to her, but also in the way of her designs against La Tournoire. Her strange agitation? A mask to cover the real excitement that one in her position must have felt. Her aspect of horror at the disclosure that I was La Tournoire? This may have been real, coming from a fear that she might have betrayed herself by the curiosity she had shown about me, that the eyes of La Tournoire must be keener than those of the light-hearted man she had taken me to be, that I had dissembled to her as well as to De Berquin, that I had been playing with her from the first. After she knew me to be La Tournoire, and was assured that I did not suspect her, she no more spoke of my going from her. What was her weakness of body at Maury but a pretext for delay, that the governor might have time to come to Clochonne and the project of the am-

bush be carried out? She had forged chains of love to hold me where she was. Her coyness but kept those chains the stronger, her postponement of the surrender made it the more impossible for me to leave her side. Who can go from the woman he loves while his fate is uncertain? If she had made no show of love, I could have left her. If she had confessed her love in words, and promised to be my own, I could have endured to leave her for a time. How well she knew men! How well she had maintained just that appearance which kept my thoughts on her night and day, which made me unwilling to lose sight of her, and which would have made me instantly responsive to any summons that she might have sent me from any part of the forest!

So, then, there were two sides, two appearances, to this woman. The one, the good side, that which I had seen, that which had been the joy of my life, was not real, was but a seeming, had no existence but in pretence. The other, the wicked side, was the real one, was the actual woman. I had never known her. What I had known was but an assumption; it had no being. Was this credible? Could a bad woman so delude one with an angelic pretence, so conceal her wicked self? If so, to what depths of vileness might she not be capable of descending? Was it, then, not that I had lost my beloved, but that she had never existed? At thought of it, I

felt a sickness within, a weakness, a choking, a giving way. And then her image came before me again, as she had stood in the moonlit garden, and my beloved was born again. The woman I had known was the real one. I had done her incredible wrong to have thought otherwise. But whether good or bad, whether or not my betrayer, I loved her; I longed for her; I would see her face; I would clasp her in my arms; I would claim her as my own; I would hold her against her own will and the world's. On, my horse, on! Where is she now, what has befallen her, how soon shall my heart bound at sight of her before me in the night? On! Whether she lead me to heaven or to hell, I must be with her; I cannot wait!

Presently we came to the abode of Godeau and Marianne, where the forest path runs into the old road across the mountains. We had to check our speed here, on account of the thick growth of vegetation that served to mask the forest path from travellers on the road. We emerged from this, and turned the heads of our horses towards Clochonne.

The door of the inn opened, and Marianne came forth. She had been watching.

"Monsieur," she said, "I did not know whether to come to you or not. I have been keeping my eyes and ears open for any of the governor's troops."

"But you have seen or heard none," I answered, impatiently.

"None, monsieur. But some one has ridden by, towards Clochonne — the lady!"

I knew from her tone that she saw in Mademoiselle's flight alone sufficient reason for suspicion of mademoiselle and for alarm on my own part. She, too, thought mademoiselle guilty, myself duped. I first thought to pretend that mademoiselle's departure was a thing agreed on by her and me, but it was no time to value the opinion of a peasant.

"On, Frojac!" I said, and on we went. We could make better speed now, for the road, though little used and in bad condition, was continuous and, unlike the forest path, comparatively free of intrusive vegetation. It was hard, too, for the weather had been dry for a long time. The loud clatter of the horses' hoofs was some relief to my eager heart.

There is a place where this road passes near the verge of a precipice, which, like that at Maury, falls sheer to the road along the River Creuse from Clochonne to Narjec. But, unlike that at Maury, this declivity is bare of trees.

We were galloping steadily on and were approaching this place in the road. Frojac was now riding at my side, as there was room for two horsemen to go abreast.

"Hark!" said Frojac, suddenly. "Do you hear something?"

I heard the sounds made by our riding, but no other.

"Horsemen," he went on. "And men afoot, on the march!"

"Where?" I asked. We continued to gallop forward.

"Ahead," he answered. "Don't you hear, monsieur?"

I listened. Yes, there was the far-off sound of many shod feet striking hard earth.

"It is ahead," said I.

"A body of troops," said Frojac.

"Then we may catch up with them."

"Or meet them. Perhaps they are coming this way."

"Troops on a night march!" said I.

Frojac looked at me. I saw written on his face the same thought that he saw on mine.

"Whose else could they be?" he said. "And for what other purpose?"

Had Monsieur de la Chatre, then, chosen this night for a surprise and attack on me at Maury? If he knew my hiding-place, why should he not have done so? The idea of the ambush, then, had been abandoned? Perhaps, indeed, the plan that I had overheard Montignac outline to La Chatre had been

greatly modified. Had mademoiselle, if she were in truth the governor's agent, known of this night attack, if it were in truth a night attack against me? Had she fled in order to avoid the shame or the danger of being present at my capture? These and many other questions rushed through my mind.

"What shall we do?" asked Frojac, after a time.

"Go on," said I.

"But if we meet them, and they are La Chatre's men, I fear that our chances of catching up with the lady will be small."

"But, after all, we do not know who they are. If they are coming this way, they must have met her by this time. Perhaps they have stopped her? Who knows? I must follow her."

"But now it seems that the sound comes more from the north. They are certainly coming nearer. They may be on the river road. We can see by going to the edge of the precipice and looking down."

"We should lose time."

"'Tis but a little way out of the road. This is where the road is nearest to the edge."

It might, indeed, be to my advantage to learn at once whether the troops were in the road in front of us or in the road at the foot of the mountain. So I fought down my impatience, and we turned from the road towards the precipice. There was little under-

brush here to hinder us, and in a very short time we reined in our horses and looked down on the vast stretch of moonlit country below.

At the very foot of the steep was the road that runs from Clochonne to Narjec. And there, moving from the former towards the latter, went a troop of horsemen, followed by a foot company of arquebusiers. They trailed along, like a huge dark worm on the yellow way, following the turns of the road. Seen from above, their figures were shortened and looked squat.

I looked among the horsemen.

"I cannot see La Chatre," said I.

"But some of these are his men," said Frojac, "for I see my old comrade. He knew nothing today of this march. I see most of the men of the Clochonne garrison. I wonder what use they expect to make of their horses if they intend to approach Maury from the river road."

I recalled now the exact words in which I had indicated to mademoiselle the location of my hiding-place. I had said that it might be reached by turning up the wooded hill from the river road, at the rock shaped like a throne. Was it, indeed, in accordance with directions communicated to La Chatre by her that they were now proceeding?

"If they are bound for Maury," said I, "they have hit on a good time. Blaise and the men will have left

there long before they arrive. Come, Frojac, we lose precious minutes!"

"One thing is good, monsieur," said Frojac, as our horses resumed their gallop towards Clochonne. "If we do have to follow the lady all the way to Clochonne, we shall not find many soldiers there when we arrive. Nearly all of La Chatre's men and the garrison troops are down there on the river road, marching further from Clochonne every minute."

Alas, it was not then of troops to be encountered that I thought! It was of what disclosure might be awaiting me concerning mademoiselle. Would she admit her guilt or demonstrate her innocence? Would she prove to be that other woman, or the one I had known? Would she laugh or weep, be brazen or overwhelmed? How would she face me? That was my only thought. Let me dare death a thousand times over, only to know the truth, — nay, only to see her again!

So we sped forward on the road, which, by its length and its windings, makes a gradual descent of the northern slope of the wooded ridge. At last we came to the foot of the steep, emerged from the forest, turned northward, and then saw before us, a little to the right, the sleeping town of Clochonne. At the further end of that, on an eminence commanding the river, stood the château, looking inaccessible and impregnable.

I thought of the day when I had first seen the château, the day when we had come over the mountains from the south, and Frojac had pointed out to me where it stood in the distance. That was before I had met mademoiselle or knew that she was in the world. Little had I thought that ever I should be hastening madly towards that château in the night on such an errand or in such turmoil of heart!

We came to the point where the road by which we had come converges with two others. One of these, joining from the right, also comes from the south, and is, in fact, the new road across the mountains. The other, joining from the left, is the road from Narjec, the one which runs along the river and the base of the hills. It is this one which passes the throne-shaped rock beneath Maury, and on which we had seen the troops. Had we, coming from the mountains, reached this spot before the troops coming from Clochonne reached it, we should have met them; but they had passed this spot long before we had seen them from the height.

Blaise and the men, whom I had ordered to follow me, would have left Maury soon after I had. Certainly they would not be there when the governor's troops should arrive. Coming by the road that I had used, Blaise would not meet the governor's men on their way to Maury. But the road by the river

was much the shorter. The governor's men, on discovering Maury deserted, might return immediately to Clochonne. They might reach this spot before Blaise's men did, or about the same time. Then there would be fighting.

These thoughts came into my mind at sight of the converging roads, not as matters of concern to me, but as mere casual observations. There was matter of greater moment to claim my anxiety. As to what might be the end of this night, as to what might occur after my meeting with mademoiselle, as to what might befall Blaise and my men, I had no thought.

And now, turning slightly northeastward, the road lay straight before us, between the town wall and the river, up an incline, to the gate of the château. This gate opens directly from the courtyard of the château to the road outside the town wall. The château has a gate elsewhere, which opens to the town, within the town wall.

The road ascended straight before us, I say, and on that road, making for the château gate, was a horse, and on the horse a woman. She leaned forward, urging the horse on. Over her shoulders was a mantle, a small cap was on her head. Her hair streamed out behind her as she rode. My heart gave a great bound.

"Look, Frojac! It is she!"

"We cannot catch her. She is too near the château."

"She will be detained at the gate."

"If she is the governor's agent, she will know what word to give the guards. They will have orders to admit her, day or night. One who goes on such business may be expected at any hour."

The manner of her reception at the gate, then, would disclose the truth. If she were admitted without parley, it would be evident that she was in the governor's service. My heart sank. Those who ride so fast towards closed gates, at such an hour, expect the gates to let them in.

"Mademoiselle!" I called.

But my voice was hoarse. I had no command over it. I could not give it volume. She made no sign. It was evident that she had not heard it. She did not seem to know that she was pursued. She did not look back. Was she so absorbed in her own thoughts, in her desire to reach her destination, that she was conscious of nothing else?

Frojac was right. She was already too near the château for us to overtake her before she arrived at the gate. We could but force our panting horses to their best, and keep our eyes on her. The moon was now in the west, and there was no object on the western side of the road to make a shadow. So we did not once lose sight of her. She approached

the château gate without diminution of speed; it looked as if she heeded it not, or expected the horse to leap it.

"Even if they do admit her promptly," said I, "it will take a little time to lower the bridge over the ditch. We may then come up to her."

"Can you not see?" said Frojac. "The bridge is already down."

So it was. The troops had, doubtless, departed by this gate; the bridge, let down for their departure, was still down, doubtless for their return. The guards left at the château were, certainly, on the alert for this return. In the event of any hostile force appearing in the meantime, they could raise the bridge; but such an event was most unlikely. The only hostile force in the vicinity was my own company. It is thus that I accounted for the fact that the bridge was down.

Right up to the gate she rode, the horse coming to a quick stop on the bridge at the moment when it looked as if he were about to dash his head against the gate.

With straining ears I listened, as I rode on towards her.

She called out. I could hear her voice, but could not make out her words. For some time she sat on her horse waiting, watching the gate before her. I was surprised that she did not hear the clatter of our

horses and look around. Then she called again. I heard an answer from the other side of the gate, and then the way was opened. She rode at once into the courtyard.

We pressed on, Frojac and I, myself knowing not what was to come, he content to follow me and face whatever might arise. The immediate thing was to reach the château, as mademoiselle had done. Some means must be found for getting entrance, for now that mademoiselle was inside, I looked to see the gate fall into place at once.

But we beheld the unexpected. The gate remained open. No guard appeared in the opening. We galloped up the hill, over the bridge, into the courtyard. Nothing hindered us. What did it mean?

We stopped our horses and dismounted. There in the courtyard stood mademoiselle's horse, trembling and panting, but mademoiselle herself had disappeared. Before us was an open door, doubtless the principal entrance to the château. Mademoiselle had probably gone that way.

"Come, Frojac!" said I, and started for this door.

But at that instant we heard rough exclamations and hasty steps behind us. We turned and drew sword. From the guard-house by the gate, where they must have been gambling or drinking or sleep-

ing, or otherwise neglecting their duty, came four men, who seemed utterly astonished at sight of us.

"Name of the Virgin!" cried one. "The gate open! Where is Lavigue? He has left his post! Who are you?"

"Enemies! Down with La Chatre!" I answered, seeing in a flash that an attempt to fool them might be vain and would take time. A quick fight was the thing to serve me best, for these men had been taken by surprise, and two of them had only halberds, one had a sword, the fourth had an arquebus but his match was out.

It was the man with the sword who had spoken. He it was who now spoke again:

"Enemies? Prisoners, then! Yield!"

And he rushed up to us, accompanied by the halberdiers, while the arquebusier ran to light his match at a torch in the guard-house.

Never was anything so expeditiously done. The leader knew nothing of fine sword work. I had my point through his lungs before the halberdiers came up. While I was pulling it out, one of the halberdiers aimed a blow at me, and the other threatened Frojac. My follower dodged the thrust meant for him, and at the same instant laid low, with a wound in the side, the fellow who was aiming at me. Thus one of the halberdiers followed the swordsman to earth instantly. The second halberdier recovered

himself, and made to attack Frojac again, but I caught his weapon in my left hand, and so held it, while Frojac ran towards the arquebusier, who was now coming from the guard-house with lighted match. The halberdier, whose weapon I now grasped in one hand, while I held my sword in the other, took fright, let his weapon go, and ran from the courtyard through the open gateway. The arquebusier tried to bring his weapon to bear on Frojac, but Frojac dropped on his knees and, thrusting from below, ran his sword into the man's belly. The man fell with a groan, dropping his weapon and his match.

I looked around. The courtyard was empty. Were these four, then, the only soldiers that had been left to guard the château? No, for these four had been surprised to find the gate open. Some one else must have opened the gate for mademoiselle. Moreover, the swordsman had spoken of a Lavigue. "Take the arquebus and the match, Frojac," said I, "and come. There is nothing to be done here at present."

He obeyed me, and we returned to the door of the château. Just as we were about to enter, I heard steps as of one coming down a staircase within. Then a man came out. He was a common soldier and he carried a halberd. At sight of us he stopped, and stood in the greatest astonishment. Then he

looked towards the gate. His expression became one of the utmost consternation.

A thought came to me. I recalled what the swordsman said.

"You are Lavigue?" said I to the soldier.

"Yes," he said, bewildered.

"You were on duty at that gate, but you left your post."

"Yes, but —"

"But you first opened the gate for a lady."

"It was not I, monsieur," he answered, as if anxious to exonerate himself, although he knew not to whom he was talking. "It was my comrade. He said he knew the woman, and that the governor would wish her instantly admitted, and he opened the gate. When she came in, I would have had her wait at the gate till M. de la Chatre had been informed, but she ran into the château, and my comrade with her. There must be something wrong, I thought, if my comrade would leave his post to go in with the lady. So I ran after them to get her to come back. It was my thought of my duty that made me forget the gate. Indeed it was so, monsieur."

He evidently thought that we were friends of the governor's who had happened to arrive at the château at this hour.

So he, at least, had not received orders to admit

mademoiselle. Joyful hope! Perhaps there had been no understanding between her and the governor, after all! But his comrade had let her in, had said that the governor would wish the gate opened to her at once. Then there was an understanding.

"Where is your comrade?" I asked.

"I left him with the lady, in the chamber at the head of the staircase. Ah, I hear him coming down the stairs!"

"Look to this man, Frojac," said I, and then hastened into the chtâeau. The moonlight through the open door showed a large vestibule, from which the staircase ascended towards the right. The man coming down this staircase was at the bottom step when I entered the vestibule. He stopped there, taken by surprise. I saw that he was of short stature and slight figure. I caught him by the back of the neck with my left hand, and brought him to his knees before me.

"Where is the lady who but now entered the château?" I said. "Why are you silent, knave?"

He trembled in my grasp, and I turned his face up towards mine. It was the face of mademoiselle's boy, Pierre, who had left us in the forest!

"You here?" I cried. "It was you, then, who opened the gate to her! How came you here? Speak, if ever you would see the blue sky again!"

I pressed my fingers into his throat, until he

choked and the fear of death showed in his starting eyes; then I released my clasp, that he might speak.

"Oh, monsieur, have mercy!" he gasped. "Do not kill me!"

I saw that he was thoroughly frightened for his life. He was but a boy, and to a boy the imminent prospect of closing one's eyes forever is not pleasant.

"Speak, then! Tell the truth!" I said, still holding him by the neck, ready to tighten my clasp at any moment.

"I will, I will!" he said. "I went from Mlle. de Varion to M. de la Chatre, with a message, and he kept me in his service."

"What message? The truth, boy! I shall see in your eyes whether or not it be truth you tell me, and if you lie your eyes shall never look on the world again. Quick, what message?"

"That I came from Mlle. de Varion to the governor," he answered, huskily, "and that at the top of the hill that rises from the throne-shaped rock by the river road to Narjec is the burrow of the Huguenot fox!"

The last doubt, the last hope, was gone!

"My God!" I cried, and cast the boy away from me. What now to me was he or anything that he might do or say? He cowered for a moment on the ground, looking up at me, and then, seeing

that I no longer heeded him, ran out to the courtyard.

For a moment I stood alone in the vestibule, crushed by the terrible certainty. All women, then, were as bad as Mlle. d'Arency. The sweet and tender girl who had filled my heart was as the worst of them. To be betrayed was deplorable, but to be betrayed by her! To find her a traitress was terrible, but that I should be her dupe! And that I should still love her, love her, love her!

What, she was in the château, under this roof, and I tarried here deploring her treason when I might be at her side, clasping her, looking into her eyes! "In the chamber at the head of the staircase," the guard had said. I forgot Frojac, the guard, Pierre. But one thought, one desire, one impulse, possessed me. With my dripping sword in my hand, I bounded up the stairs. They led me to a narrow gallery, which had windows on the side next the courtyard. There were doors on the other side. A single light burned. No one was in the gallery. The door nearest the staircase landing was slightly open. I ran to it and into the chamber to which it gave entrance.

As in the gallery, so in the chamber, I found no one. I stood just within the threshold and looked around. The walls of the apartment were hung with tapestry. At the right was first a win-

dow, then a chimney-place, beside which stood a sword, then a *prieu-dieu*. Before the fireplace was a table, on which were a lamp burning, paper, ink, pens, and a large bowl of fruit. At the left of the chamber was a large bed, its curtains drawn aside. Beside this was another table, on which was an empty tray. There was a door, slightly ajar, in that side of the room, and another in the side that faced me. On the back of a chair near the fireplace was slung a hunting-horn. On a stool near the door by which I had entered lay a belt with a dagger in sheath. The bed looked as if some one had recently lain on it. The presence of the fruit, writing materials, and other things seemed to indicate that this was the chamber of M. de la Chatre. But why was he not in his bed? Probably he could not sleep while he awaited the result of this midnight enterprise of his troops. Certainly the servants in the château were asleep. It was apparent that the six guards, four of whom we had disposed of, were the only soldiers left at the château, for, if there had been any others in the guard-house, they would have been awakened by the fight in the courtyard. How many troops were left in the town, I could not know, but they would not come to the château during the night unless brought by an alarm. So there would not be many to interpose themselves between mademoiselle and

me. But where was she? Whither should I first turn to seek her.

I had well-nigh chosen to try the room at the left, when the door opposite me opened without noise, and a figure glided into the chamber, swiftly and silently. The movement was that of a person who rapidly traverses a place in search of some one.

"Mademoiselle!"

She heard me, saw me, stopped, and stood with parted lips, astounded face, and terror-stricken eyes.

So we stood, the width of the room between us, regarding each other.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEHIND THE CURTAINS.

So we stood. Irresistible as had been my impulse to follow her, I now found myself held back, as if by the look in her eyes, from approaching nearer. So, while she gazed at me in wonder and terror, I regarded her with inexpressible scorn and love, horror and adoration.

Presently she spoke, in a terrified whisper:

"Why are you here?"

I answered in a low voice:

"Because you are here. Like a poisonous flower you lure me. A flower you are in outward beauty! Never was poison more sweetly concealed than is treachery in you!"

"You were mad to follow me!" she said, and then she cast a quick, apprehensive glance around the chamber, a glance that took in the different doors one after another.

I thought she meant that, as we were in the stronghold of my enemies and her friends, it would be madness in me to attempt to punish her treachery. So I replied:

"Seek not to fright me from vengeance, for I intend none! I did not come to punish. I do not know why it is, but where you are not I cannot rest. I am drawn to you as by some power of magic. I would be with you even in hell! Spy, traitress that you are, I love you! Your dupe that I am, I love you!" I went to where, with downcast eyes, she stood, and I caught her hand and pressed it to my lips. "I make myself a jest, a thing for laughter, do I not, kissing the hand that would slay me?"

She raised her eyes, and held out her hand towards the fire-place, saying:

"The hand that I would thrust into the flame to save you from the lightest harm!"

What? Now that I was here, now that my capture seemed certain, would she pretend that she had not acted for La Chatre against me? She did not know that I had met Pierre, and what he had confessed to me.

"Mock me as you will, mademoiselle!" said I.

"Mistrust me as *you* will, monsieur! I tell you, I would not have you undergo the smallest harm!"

"You well sustain the jest!"

"Before God," she answered, "I do not jest!"

There was in her voice a ring of earnestness that seemed impossible to be counterfeit. Puzzled, I looked at her, trying to read her countenance.

"Yet," I said, presently, "you were a spy upon me!"

"I was, God pity me! Scourge me with rough words as you will; I merit every blow!"

"And you came here to see La Chatre," I went on, "perhaps because you feared discovery, perhaps because you thought your work of betrayal was done" (for I thought that she may have known of the midnight march of the governor's troops), "perhaps to finish that work!"

"Now you wrong me at last!" she cried. "Thank God, I am not as bad as you can think me!"

"Then you did not come here to see La Chatre?"

"I came to see him, I admit! I was seeking him when I met you here. But it was not because I feared discovery that I left you, nor because I thought my miserable work was done, nor to finish it."

I saw now that she was in great agitation. She tottered forward to the table and put her hand on it, and leaned on it for support.

It seemed as if she were speaking the truth, as if there might be some explanation of all, but that her inward excitement was too great, her ideas too confused, for her to assemble the facts and present them in proper order. It seemed that she could answer my accusations only as they came, that she acknowledged herself guilty in part towards me, and yet did not wish me harm.

"Mademoiselle," I said, dropping my harshness and irony, "to believe you true would make me as happy as I now am wretched. But why is your boy here, in the governor's service? Why did he carry from you the secret of my hiding-place?"

Mademoiselle shuddered and gave a gesture of despair, as if there were indeed no defence for her.

"Why are the troops away, if not in quest of me?" I asked. "We saw them going towards Maury by the river road."

"I did not know that the troops had gone, or were going," she said. "I swear to you, monsieur, if troops have gone to Maury this night, I had nothing to do with their going!"

"But they knew what road to take, and how to find my hiding-place. La Chatre knew that."

"Alas, it is true!" she moaned, while tears ran down her face. "I sent him word!"

"You sent him word! You learned how to reach La Tournoire's hiding-place from the man you thought his friend, and you sent the secret to the governor, whom you knew to be his enemy? And yet you are not as bad as I can think you!"

"I sent him word of your hiding-place; but he was not to seize you till I had arranged a meeting with you alone and informed him of it!"

"You confess this! Oh, mademoiselle!"

"Consider! Did I arrange that meeting?"

"You had not time. It was but this afternoon you learned La Chatre was at Clochonne."

"Yet, instead of coming here to-night I might have done it, monsieur. I ran no risk of discovery in staying at Maury. You would still have had faith in me had I remained there. And it was easy to do; it was all planned. You know the old tower by the spring, to which we walked the other day. I was to send Hugo at midnight to M. de la Chatre, with word to have his men hidden there to-morrow at sunset. To-morrow I was to go off into the forest with Jeannotte, and at sunset she was to come to you, saying that I was at the tower grievously injured. You would have gone, monsieur, without waiting to call any of your men; you would have come at my summons on the instant, to the end of the world —"

"You knew that? Truly, the heart of man is an open page to women!"

"It was easily to be done, monsieur. Hugo could have shown the troops the way. The place was well chosen. Neither your sentinels nor the inn people would have seen the troops. They would have hidden there in wait for you. So we had planned it, I and Jeannotte; but I abandoned it. I gave no orders to Hugo. I came to Clochonne."

"Yes, knowing, perchance, that I would come

after you. You thought to make of Clochonne a trap into which to lead me! You were careful to let it be known where you were coming, that I might find out and follow!"

"I told only my maid and Hugo, in a moment of excitement, when I scarce knew what I said. I no more desired you to follow than I desired myself to stay at Maury to call you to the ambush!"

"The ambush!" I echoed. "You forget one thing, mademoiselle, when you take credit for renouncing the ambush. The troops have gone already to Maury. Had they found me there, they would have made your ambush unnecessary or impossible."

"But I knew nothing of their going to Maury," she said, helplessly. "It was not to have been so. You were to have been taken by an ambush, I say! If the governor sent troops to attack you to-night, he must have changed the plan."

Now, I could indeed believe this, for I had overheard the plan suggested by Montignac, and her very talk about the ambush seemed to show that his plan had been adopted without change. In that case, she might not have known of the movement of the troops. La Chatre might have decided, at any time, to change his plan. Perhaps he had done this, and, for lack of means or for some other reason, had not tried to inform her, or had tried in vain.

She stood like an accused woman before her

judges, incapable of formulating her defence, expressing her distress by an occasional low, convulsive sob. What did her conduct mean? Was her demeanor genuine or assumed? Why did she confess one thing and deny another? Why did she seem guilty and not guilty?

"I am puzzled more and more," I said. "I thought that, when I saw you, I should at least learn the truth. I should at least know whether to love you as an angel, who had been wronged alike by circumstances and by report, or as a beautiful demon, who would betray me to my death; but I am not even to know what you are. You betrayed my hiding-place. So far, at least, you are guilty; but you did not arrange the ambush that you were to have arranged. For so much you claim credit. Whatever are your wishes in regard to me, they shall be fulfilled. I am yours, to be sent to my death, if that is your will. What would you have me do?"

"Save yourself!" she whispered, eagerly, her eyes suddenly aflame with a kind of hope, as if the possibility had just occurred to her.

Was this pretence? Did she know that I could not escape, and did she yet wish, for shame's or vanity's sake, to appear well in my eyes?

"I shall not leave you," I said, quietly.

"Hark!" she whispered. "Some one comes!"

She looked towards the door near the head of the bed, the door that was slightly ajar. She looked aghast, as one does at the apprehension of a great and imminent danger. "Go while there is time! Do you not hear? It is the voice of La Chatre! I recognize it! And the other, — his secretary, Montignac! Go, go, I pray you on my knees, flee while there is yet time!"

She did indeed fall to her knees, clutching my arm with one hand, and with the other trying to push me from the room, all the while showing a very anguish of solicitude on her white face. Her eyes plead with me for my own deliverance. The voices, which I too recognized, came nearer and nearer, but slowly, as if the speakers were impeded in their progress through the adjoining chamber. "Save yourself, save yourself!" she continued to whisper.

"Come what may," I whispered in reply, my hand tightening on my sword, "I will not leave you!"

"Then," she whispered, rapidly, seeing that I was not to be moved, "if you will court death, at least know me first as I am, — no better, no worse! Hide somewhere, — there behind the bed-curtains, — and hear what I shall say to La Chatre! After that, if death find you, he shall find me with you! I implore you, conceal yourself."

There was no pretence now, I was sure. Mysti-

fied, yet not doubting, I whispered: "I yield, mademoiselle! God knows I would believe you innocent!" and went behind the curtains, at the foot of the bed. It was easy to stand behind these without disturbing the natural folds in which they fell to the floor. The curtains at the sides also served to shield me from view, so that I could not have been seen except from within the bed itself.

I had no sooner found this concealment, and mademoiselle had no sooner taken her place, standing with as much composure as she could assume, a short distance from the foot of the bed, than M. de la Chatre and his secretary entered the chamber. Peering between the curtains, I saw that La Chatre was lame, and that he walked with the aid of a stick on one side and Montignac's shoulder on the other.

"To think," he was saying as he came in, "that the misstep of a horse should have made a helpless cripple of me, when I might have led this hunt myself!"

I assumed that the "hunt" was the expedition to Maury, and smiled to think how far was the game from the place of hunting.

The undisturbed mien of La Chatre showed that he had not heard of the arrival of mademoiselle or of myself, or of the brief fight in the courtyard. He would not have worn that look of security had he known that, of six guards at the château, three now

lay dead in the courtyard, one had fled, and two were being looked after by my man Frojac.

He wore a rich chamber-robe and was bareheaded. Montignac was attired rather like a soldier than like a scribe, having on a buff jerkin and wearing both sword and dagger. His breeches and hose were of dull hue, so that the only brightness of color on him was the red of his hair and lips. It was, doubtless, from an excess of precaution that he went so well armed in the château at so late an hour. Yet I smiled to see weapons on this slight and fragile-looking youth, whose strength lay in his brain rather than in his wrist. With great interest I watched him now, knowing that he had devised the plan for my capture, had caused Mlle. de Varion to be sent on her mission against me, and had sent De Berquin on his mission against her. This march of the troops to Maury, also, was probably his doing, even though it did imply a change from the plan overheard by me, and confessed by mademoiselle. He had, too, if De Berquin had told the truth, resolved to possess mademoiselle. He was thus my worst foe, this subtle youth who had never seen me, and whom I had never injured. He still had that look of mock humility, repressed scorn, half-concealed derision, hidden ambition, vast inner resource, mental activity, all under a calm and thoughtful countenance, over which he had control.

It was not until they had passed the bed that they saw mademoiselle. Both stopped and looked astonished. Montignac recognized her at once, and first frowned, as if annoyed; then looked elated, as if her presence suited his projects. But La Chatre did not immediately know her. He lost color, as if it were a spirit that he saw, and, indeed, mademoiselle, motionless and pale, looked not unlike some beautiful being of another world.

"Who are you?" asked La Chatre, in a startled tone.

"It is I — Mlle. de Varion."

La Chatre promptly came to himself; but he looked somewhat confused, abashed, and irritated.

"Mlle. de Varion, indeed!" he said. "And why comes Mlle. de Varion here?"

And now Montignac spoke, fixing his eyes on La Chatre, and using a quiet but resolute tone:

"She comes too late. La Tournoire will be taken without her aid."

"Be silent, Montignac!" said La Chatre, assuming the authoritative for the sake of appearance. "It is true, mademoiselle; you are too late in fulfilling your part of the agreement."

He spoke with some embarrassment, and I began to see why. Inasmuch as he had been at Clochonne but little more than one day, no more time had passed than would have been necessary for the

arrangement of the ambush. Therefore it could not be honestly held that she had been tardy in fulfilling her mission; that is to say, when he told her that she was too late, he lied. Hence his embarrassment, for he was a gentleman. Now why did he put forth this false pretext of tardiness on her part?

"Too late in fulfilling your part of the agreement," said the governor.

"I came, monsieur," said mademoiselle, heedless of the lie and the apparent attempt to put her at fault, "to be released from my agreement."

Montignac looked surprised, then displeased. La Chatre appeared relieved, but astonished.

"Released, mademoiselle?" he exclaimed, assuming too late a kind of virtuous displeasure to cover his real satisfaction.

"Released, monsieur!" said mademoiselle. "I shall no further help you take M. de la Tournoire. It was to tell you that, and for nothing else in the world, that I came to Clochonne this night!"

She was close to the bed-curtains behind which I stood. I felt that her words were meant for my ears as well as for the governor's.

"I shall not need your help, mademoiselle," replied the governor, with a side smile at Montignac. "Yet this is strange. You do not, then, wish your father's freedom?"

"Not on the terms agreed on, monsieur! Not to have my father set free from prison, not even to save him from torture, not even from death. I take back my promise, and give you back your own. I gave you word of La Tournoire's hiding-place, and so far resigned my honor. I abandon my hateful task unfinished, and so far I get my honor back. And, now, do as you will!"

I could have shouted for joy!

This, then, explained it all. She had undertaken to betray me, but it was to save her father! I remembered now. They had wanted a spy "who would have all to lose by failure." Such were Montignac's words at the inn at Fleurier. A spy, too, who might gain a wary man's confidence, and with whom a rebel captain might desire or consent to a meeting away from his men. Hardly had their need been uttered when there came mademoiselle to beg a pardon for her father. A woman, beautiful and guileless, whom any man might adore and trust, of whom any man might beg a tryst; a woman, whose father was already in prison, his fate at the governor's will; a woman, inexperienced and credulous, easily made to believe that her father's crime was of the gravest; a woman, dutiful and affectionate, willing to purchase her father's life and freedom at any cost. What better instrument could have come to their hands? Her anxiety to save her

father would give her the powers of dissimulation necessary to do the work. Her purity and innocence were a rare equipment for the task of a Delilah. Who would suspect her of guile and intrigue any more than I had done?

And now, having gone as far as she had in the task, she had abandoned it. Even to save her father, she would no more play the traitress against me! Against *me!* She loved me, then! Her task had become intolerable. She must relieve herself of it. Yet as long as La Chatre still supposed that she was carrying it out, she would feel bound by her obligation to him. She must free herself of that obligation. She had made a compact with him, she had given him her word. Though she resolved not to betray me, she would not betray him either. He must no longer rely on her for the performance of a deed that she had cast from her. She must not play false even with him. All must hereafter be open and honest with her. The first step towards regaining her self-respect was to see the governor and renounce the commission. Then, but not till then, would she dare confess all to me. I saw all this in an instant, as she had felt it, for people do not arrive at such resolutions slowly and by reason, but instantly and by feeling.

And all that she had done and suffered had been to save her father! Had I but told her at once of

my intention to deliver him, if possible, all this, and my own hours of torment, might have been avoided. From what little things do events take their course!

I rejoiced, I say, behind the curtains, on learning the truth. What matter if we met death together in the enemy's stronghold, now that she was pure and loved me? And yet, if we could but find a way out of this, and save her father as well, what joy life would have!

La Chatre cast another jubilant smile at Montignac. The governor was plainly delighted that mademoiselle herself had given up the task, now that he had changed his plans and had no further use for her in them. It relieved him of the disagreeable necessity of making her an explanation composed of lies. He was really a gallant and amiable gentleman, and subterfuge, especially when employed against a lady, was obnoxious to him. As for Montignac, he stood frowning meditatively. He surely guessed that mademoiselle's act was inspired by love for me, and the thought was not pleasant to him.

Suddenly the governor turned quite pale, and asked quickly, in some alarm:

"Did you speak the truth when you sent word of his hiding-place?"

It would, indeed, have been exasperating if he had sent his troops on a false scent.

Mademoiselle hesitated a moment, then turned her eyes towards the bed-curtains, and said:

"Yes, monsieur."

Her look, as I saw it, expressed that my position was not so bad, after all, as long as the troops were away, and La Chatre supposed that I was at Maury being captured by them.

La Chatre, reassured by her tone, which of course had the ring of truth, again breathed freely.

"Then I release you from your agreement, mademoiselle," he said, and added slowly and with a curious look at Montignac, "and your father may languish in the château of Fleurier. But note this, mademoiselle: you withdraw your aid from our purpose of capturing this traitor. Therefore, you wish him freedom. For you, in the circumstances, not to oppose him is to aid him. That is treason. I must treat you accordingly, mademoiselle."

"I have said, do with me as you will," she answered. For a time, relieved of the burden that had weighed so heavily on her, she seemed resigned to any fate. It was not yet that her mind rose to activity, and she began to see possibilities of recovering something from the ruins.

And now the demeanor of La Chatre became peculiar. He spoke to mademoiselle, while he looked at Montignac, as if he were taking an unexpected opportunity to carry out something pre-

arranged between him and the secretary; as if he were dissembling to her, and sought Montignac's attention and approval. His look seemed to say to the secretary, "You see how well I am doing it?" Montignac stood with folded arms and downcast eyes, attending carefully to La Chatre's words, but having too much tact to betray his interest.

"And yet," said La Chatre, "you have been of some service to me in this matter, and I would in some measure reward you. You sent me information of La Tournoire's whereabouts, and for so much you deserve to be paid. But you leave unfinished the service agreed on, and of course you cannot claim your father's release."

"Yet, if I have at all served you in this, as unhappily I have, there is no other payment that you possibly can make me," said mademoiselle.

"The question as to whether you ought to be rewarded for what you have done, or held guilty of treasonable conduct in withdrawing at so late a stage," said La Chatre, "is a difficult matter for me to deal with. There may be a way in which it can be settled with satisfaction to yourself. It is your part, not mine, to find such a way and propose it. You may take counsel of some one — of my secretary, M. Montignac. He is one who, unlike yourself, is entitled to my favor and the King's, and who may, on occasion, demand some deviation

from the strict procedure of justice. Were he to ask, as a favor to himself, special lenience for your father, or even a pardon and release, his request would have to be seriously considered. Advise her, Montignac. I shall give you a few minutes to talk with her."

And La Chatre, aided by his stick, made his way to the window, where he stood with his back towards the other two.

I was not too dull to see that all this was but a clumsy way of throwing mademoiselle's fate and her father's into the hands of Montignac. The governor's manner, as I have indicated, showed that he had previously agreed to do this on fit occasion, and that he now perceived that occasion.

A new thought occurred to me. Had Montignac, coming more and more to desire mademoiselle, and doubting the ability of his hastily found instrument, De Berquin, sought and obtained the governor's sanction to his wishes? Had he advised this midnight march to Maury in order that I might be caught ere mademoiselle could fulfil her mission; in order, that is to say, to prevent her from earning her father's freedom by the means first proposed; in order that La Chatre might name a new price for that freedom; in order, in fine, that herself should be the price, and Montignac the recipient? Montignac could persuade the governor to anything, why

not to this? It was a design worthy alike of the secretary's ingenuity and villainy. Circumstance soon showed that I was right, that the governor had indeed consented to this perfidy. Mademoiselle's unexpected arrival at Clochonne had given excellent occasion for the project to be carried out. The governor himself had recognized the fitness of the time. No wonder that he had at first falsely charged her with tardiness, pretended that her delay had caused the alteration of his plans. He had needed a pretext for having sent his troops to capture me so that he might cheat her of her reward. I burned with indignation. That two men of power and authority should so trick a helpless girl, so use her love for her father to serve their own purposes, so employ that father's very life as coin with which to buy her compliance, so cozen her of the reward of what service she had done, so plot to make of her a slave and worse, so threaten and use and cheat her! No man ever felt greater wrath than I felt as I stood behind the curtains and saw Montignac lift his eyes to mademoiselle's in obedience to the governor's command. Yet, by what power I know not, I held myself calm, ready to act at the suitable moment. I had taken a resolution, and would carry it out if sword and wit should serve me. But meanwhile I waited unseen.

Mademoiselle drew back almost imperceptibly,

and on her face came the slightest look of repugnance. From her manner of regarding him, it was evident that this was not the first time she had been conscious of his admiration and felt repelled by it. The meeting in the inn at Fleurier had left with her a vastly different impression from that which it had left with him.

Without smiling, he now bowed very courteously, and placed a chair for her near where she stood.

"Mademoiselle," he said, with great tenderness, yet most respectfully, "a harder heart than mine would be moved by your gentleness and beauty."

And here my own heart beat very rapidly at sound of another man speaking so adoringly to my beloved.

She looked at him questioningly, as if his tone and manner showed that she had misjudged him. His bearing was so gentle and sympathetic that she could not but be deceived by it. She ceased to show repugnance, and sat in the chair that he had brought.

"Monsieur," she said, "in my first opinion I may have wronged you. If your heart is truly moved, you can demonstrate your goodness by asking for my father's freedom. M. de la Chatre will grant it to you. You have a claim on his favor, as he says, while I have none. Free my father, then, and make me happy!"

Poor Julie! She thought not of herself. She knew that it would be useless to ask anything for me. Yet there was one thing that might be had from the situation — her father's freedom. So she summoned her energies, and devoted them to striving for that, though she was in terror of my being at any moment discovered.

"I would make you the happiest of women," said Montignac, in a low, impassioned tone, falling on one knee and taking her hand, "if you would make me the happiest of men."

Apprehension came into her eyes. She rose and moved towards the bed-curtains, and, in the vain hope of turning him from his purpose by pretending not to perceive it, said, with a sad little smile:

"Alas! it is out of my poor power to confer happiness!"

She half-turned her head towards where I stood behind the curtains, partly at thought of the happiness that it seemed impossible for her to confer on me, partly in fear lest Montignac's words might bring me forth.

"It is easily in your power to confer more than happiness," said Montignac.

"How, monsieur?" she faltered, trembling under two fears, that of Montignac's ardor and that of my disclosing myself. "I am puzzled to know."

"By conferring your hand, mademoiselle," said

Montignac, following her and grasping her wrist. "Your father will be glad to give his consent for his liberty, if he knows that you have given yours. But we can arrange to proceed without his consent. Do not draw back, mademoiselle. It is marriage that I offer, when I might make other terms. My family is a good one; my prospects are the best, and I have to lay at your feet a love that has never been offered to another, a love as deep as it is fresh —"

I clutched the curtain to give vent to my rage. Mademoiselle was looking towards me, and saw the curtain move.

"Say no more!" she cried, fearful lest his continuance might be too much for my restraint. "I cannot hear you?"

"I love you, mademoiselle," he went on, losing his self-control, so that his face quivered with passion. "I can save you and your father!"

He thrust his face so close to hers that she drew back with an expression of disgust.

"A fine love, indeed?" she cried, scornfully, "that would buy the love it dare not hope to elicit free!" And she turned to La Chatre as if for protection. But the governor shook his head, and remained motionless at the window.

"A love you shall not despise, mademoiselle!" hissed Montignac, stung by her scorn. He was

standing by the table near the bed, and, in his anger, he made to strike the table with his dagger, but he struck instead the tray on the table, and so produced a loud, ringing sound that startled the ear.

"Your fate is in my hands," he went on; "so is your father's. As for this Tournoire, concerning whom you have suddenly become scrupulous, he is, doubtless, by this time in the hands of the troops who have gone for him, and very well it is that we decided not to wait for you to lead him to us. So he had best be dismissed from your mind, as he presently will be from this life. Accept me, and your father goes free! Spurn me, and he dies in the château of Fleurier, and you shall still belong to me! Why not give me what I have the power and the intention to take?"

"If you take it," cried mademoiselle, "that is your act. Were I to give, that would be mine. It is by our own acts that we stand or fall in our own eyes and God's!" She spoke loudly, in a resolute voice, as if to show me that she could look to herself, so that I need not come out to her defence, — for well she guessed my mind, and knew that, though she had consented a thousand times to betray me, I would not stand passive while a man pressed his unwelcome love on her. And now, as if to force a change of theme by sheer vehemence of manner, she turned her back towards Montignac and addressed

La Chatre with a fire that she had not previously shown.

"You have heard the proposal of this buyer of love! You hear me reject it! M. de la Chatre, I hold you to your word. I have been of some service to you in the matter of La Tournoire, and you would, in some measure, reward me! You have said it! Very well! You expect to capture him to-night at his hiding-place. Through me you learned that hiding-place, therefore, through me you will have taken him. There is but one possible way in which you can reward me: Keep your word! What if I did refuse to plan the ambush? You yourself had already decided to dispense with that. In the circumstances, all that I could have done for you I have done. Would I could undo it! But I cannot! Therefore, give me now, at once, an order that I may take to Fleurier for my father's release!"

La Chatre was plainly annoyed, for he loved to keep the letter of his word. He could not deceive this woman, as he had at first felicitated himself on doing, with a false appearance of fair dealing. She saw through that appearance. It was indeed irritating to so honest a gentleman. To gain time for a plausible answer, he moved slowly from the window to the centre of the chamber. At the same time, mademoiselle, to be further from Montignac, went towards the door by which she had entered the

room on my arrival. The secretary, with wolf-like eyes, followed her, and both turned so as still to face the governor.

"I shall devise some proper reward for you," said La Chatre, slowly. "I adhere always to the strict letter of my word; but I am not bound to free your father. The strict letter of my word, remember! Recall my words to you at the inn. I recall them exactly, and so does Montignac, who this very evening reminded me of — ahem, that is to say, I recall them exactly. I was to send the order to the governor of Fleurier for your father's immediate release the instant I should stand face to face with the Sieur de la Tournoire in the château of Clochonne."

I threw aside the bed-curtain, stepped forth, and said:

"That time has come, monsieur!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SWORD AND DAGGER.

M. DE LA CHATRE could not have been more surprised if a spirit had risen from the floor at his feet. He stared at me with startled eyes. I had sheathed my sword while behind the curtains, and now I stood motionless, with folded arms, before him. Mademoiselle uttered a slight cry. Montignac, who stood beside her, was as much taken aback as La Chatre was, but was quicker to comprehend the situation. Without moving from his attitude of surprise, he regarded me with intense curiosity and hate. This was his first sight of me, hence his curiosity. He had already inferred that mademoiselle loved me, therefore his hate.

"Who are you?" said La Chatre, at last, in a tone of mingled alarm and resentment, as one might address a supernatural intruder.

"The Sieur de la Tournoire," said I, "standing face to face with you in the château of Clochonne! You shall give mademoiselle that order for her father's release, or you shall never break your word again."

And I drew my sword, and held it with its point towards his breast.

The fear of death blanched his cheeks and spurred his dull wits.

"Montignac," he cried, keeping his eyes fixed on mine, "if this man makes a move, kill the woman!"

In his situation of peril, his mind had become agile. He had suddenly perceived how things were between mademoiselle and me.

As I have shown, Montignac stood with mademoiselle at some distance from La Chatre and myself. I dared not take my eye from the governor, lest he should step out of reach of my sword; but I could hear Montignac quickly unsheathe his dagger, and mademoiselle give a sharp ejaculation of pain. Then I turned my head for a moment's glance, and saw that he had caught her wrist in a tight grasp, and that he held his dagger ready to plunge it into her breast.

For a short time we stood thus, while I considered what to do next. It was certain that Montignac would obey the governor's order, if only out of hatred for me and in revenge on her for his despised love, though he might fall by my sword a moment later. Therefore, I did not dare go to attack him any more than I dared attack La Chatre. The governor, of course, would not let her be killed unless I made some hostile movement, for if she were dead noth-

ing could save him from me, unless help came. He feared to call for help, I suppose, lest rather than be taken I should risk a rush at Montignac, and have himself for an instant at my mercy, after all.

I cast another glance at Montignac, and measured the distance from me to him, to consider whether I might reach him before he could strike mademoiselle. La Chatre must have divined my thought, for he said:

"Montignac, I will deal with this gentleman. Take mademoiselle into that chamber and close the door." And he pointed to the door immediately behind mademoiselle, the one by which I had first seen her enter.

"But, monsieur —" began Montignac.

"I had not quite finished, Montignac," went on La Chatre. "I have my reason for desiring you and the lady to withdraw. Fear not to leave me with him. Lame as I am, I am no match for him, it is true, but mademoiselle shall continue to be a hostage for his good behavior."

"I understand," said Montignac, "but how shall I know —?"

"Should M. de la Tournoire make one step towards me," said the governor, — here he paused and took up the hunting-horn and looked at it, but presently dropped it and pointed to the bowl of fruit on the table near the fireplace, — "I shall strike this

bowl, thus." He struck the bowl with his stick, and it gave forth a loud, metallic ring, like that previously produced by Montignac's dagger from the tray on the other table. "The voice is not always to be relied on," continued the governor. "Sometimes it fails when most needed. But a sound like this," and he struck the bowl again, "can be made instantly and with certainty. Should you hear one stroke on the bowl, — one only, not followed quickly by a second stroke, — let mademoiselle pay for the rashness of her champion!"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Montignac, a kind of diabolical triumph in his voice.

"It may be," said La Chatre, "that no such violent act will be necessary, and that I shall merely require your presence here. In that case, I shall strike twice rapidly, thus. Therefore, when you hear a stroke, wait an instant lest there be a second stroke. But if there be no second, act as I have told you."

"After you, mademoiselle," said Montignac, indicating by a motion his desire that she should precede him backward out of the chamber. He still clutched her arm and held his dagger aloft, intending thus to back out of the room after her.

"I will not go!" she answered, trying to resist the force that he was using on her arm.

This was the first resistance she had offered

She had previously stood motionless beneath his lifted dagger, feeling herself unable to break from his grasp of iron, and supposing that any effort to do so would bring down the dagger into her delicate breast. A woman's instinctive horror of such a blow deterred her from the slightest movement that might invite it. She had trusted to me for what action might serve to save us from our enemies. But now her terror of leaving my presence, and her horror of being alone with Montignac, overcame her fear of the dagger. "I will not go!" she repeated.

"Go, mademoiselle," said I, gently, taking her glove from my belt, where I had placed it, and kissing it, to show that I was still her devoted chevalier. "Go! 'Tis the better way." For I welcomed any step that might take Montignac from the chamber, and leave La Chatre's wit unaided to cope with mine.

Her eyes showed submission, and she immediately obeyed the guidance of Montignac's hand. Facing me still, he went out after her, and closed the door.

I was alone with La Chatre.

"My secretary stood a little too near the point of your sword," said the governor, "for the perfect security of my hostage. There was just a possibility of your being too quick for him. I saw that you were contemplating that possibility. As it is now, should I give him the signal, — as I shall if you

move either towards me or towards that chamber, — he could easily put mademoiselle out of the way before you could open the door. Not that I desire harm to mademoiselle. Her death would not serve me at all. It would, indeed, be something that I should have to deplore. If I should deplore it, how much more would you! And since you surely will not be so ungallant as to cause the death of so charming a lady, I think I have you, let us say, at a slight disadvantage!" And he sat down beside the table near the fireplace.

"I think not so, monsieur," said I, touching lightly with my sword's point the tray on the table near the bed; "for should you strike once on your bowl, I should very quickly strike once on this tray, so that two strokes would be heard, and the obedient Montignac, mindful of his orders, would enter this chamber, *not* having slain mademoiselle."

I ought not to have disclosed this, my advantage. I ought rather to have summoned Montignac by two strokes on the tray, and been at the door to receive him. But I had not waited to consider. I spoke of the advantage as soon as I noticed it, supposing that La Chatre, on seeing it, would think himself at my mercy and would come to my terms. He was taken back somewhat, it is true, but not much.

"Pah!" he said. "After all, I could shout to him."

"It would be your last shouting. Moreover, your shouted orders would be cut off unfinished, and the punctilious Montignac would be left in doubt as to your wishes. Rather than slay mademoiselle on an uncertainty, he would come hither to assure himself, — in which case God pity him!"

"Thank you for your warning, monsieur," said La Chatre, with mock courtesy. "There shall be no shouting."

Whereupon he struck the bowl with his stick. Taken by surprise, I could only strike my tray with my sword, so that two strokes might surely be heard, although at the same time he gave a second stroke, showing that his intention was merely to summon Montignac. In my momentary fear for mademoiselle's life, and with my thoughts instantly concentrated on striking the tray, I did not have the wit to leap to the door and receive Montignac on my sword's point, as I would have done had I myself summoned him, or had I expected La Chatre's signal.

So there I stood, far from the door, when it opened, and the secretary advanced his foot across the threshold. Even then I made a movement as if to rush on him, but he brought forward his left hand and I saw that it still clutched the white wrist of mademoiselle. Only her arm was visible in the doorway. Montignac still held his dagger raised. One

step backward and one thrust, and he could lay her dead at his feet. Had I been ready at the door for him, I could have killed him before he could have made these two movements; but from where I stood, I could not have done so. So I listened in some chagrin to the governor's words.

"I change the signal, Montignac. At one stroke, do not harm the lady, but come hither; but should you hear two strokes, or three, or any number more, she is to be sacrificed."

"My dagger is ready, monsieur!"

Again the door closed; again I was alone with La Chatre.

I had lost my former advantage. For now, should I strike my tray once, for the purpose of summoning Montignac, so that I might be at the door to slay him at first sight, the governor could strike his bowl, and Montignac would hear two strokes or more — signal for mademoiselle's death.

"And now, monsieur," said the governor, making himself comfortable in his chair between table and fireplace, "let us talk. You see, if you approach me or that door, or if you start to leave this chamber, I can easily strike the bowl twice before you take three steps."

I could see that he was not as easy in his mind as he pretended to be. It was true that, as matters now were, his life was secure through my regard

for mademoiselle's; but were he to attempt leaving the room or calling help, or, indeed, if help were to come uncalled, and I should find my own life or liberty threatened, I might risk anything, even mademoiselle's life, for the sake of revenge on him. He would not dare save himself by letting me go free out of his own château. To do that would bring down the wrath of the Duke of Guise, would mean ruin. That I knew well. If I should go to leave the chamber, he would give the signal for Montignac to kill mademoiselle. As for me, I did not wish to go without her or until I should have accomplished a certain design I had conceived. Thus I was La Chatre's prisoner, and he was mine. Each could only hope, by thought or talk, to arrive at some means of getting the better of the other.

La Chatre's back was towards the door by which I had entered. By mere chance, it seemed, I turned my head towards that door. At that instant, my man, Frojac, appeared in the doorway. He had approached with the silence of a ghost. He carried the arquebus that had belonged to the guardsman, and his match was burning. Risking all on the possible effect of a sudden surprise on the governor, I cried, sharply:

"Fire on that man, Frojac, if he moves."

La Chatre, completely startled, rose from his chair and turned about, forgetful of the stick and

bowl. When his glance reached Frojac, my good man had his arquebus on a line with the governor's head, the match dangerously near the breech.

"I have looked after the guards, monsieur," said Frojac, cheerily, "both of them."

"Stand where you are," said I to him, "and if that gentleman attempts to strike that bowl, see that he does not live to strike it more than once."

"He shall not strike it even once, monsieur!"

"You see, M. de la Chatre," said I, "the contents of an arquebus travel faster than a man can."

"This is unfair!" were the first words of the governor, after his season of dumb astonishment.

"Pardon me." said I. "It is but having you, let us say, at a slight disadvantage; and now I think I may move."

I walked over to the governor's table and took up the bowl. La Chatre watched me in helpless chagrin, informing himself by a side glance that Frojac's weapon still covered him.

"You look somewhat irritated and disgusted, monsieur," said I. "Pray sit down!"

As I held my sword across the table, the point in close proximity to his chest, he obeyed, uttering a heavy sigh at his powerlessness. I then threw the bowl into the bed, taking careful aim so that it might make no sound. At that moment I saw La Chatre look towards the chamber in which were

Montignac and mademoiselle, and there came on his face the sign of a half-formed project.

"See also, Frojac," said I, "that he does not open his mouth to shout."

"He shall be as silent as if born dumb, monsieur."

"Oh, he may speak, but not so loud as to be heard in the next chamber. Look to it, Frojac."

"Very well, monsieur."

For I did not wish, as yet, that Montignac should know what was going on. Through the closed door and the thick tapestried walls, only a loud cry, or some such sound as a stroke on the resonant bowl or tray, could have reached him. We had spoken in careful tones, La Chatre not daring to raise his voice. Thus the closing of the door, intended by the governor to make Montignac safer from a sudden rush on my part, now served my own purpose. It is true that, since Frojac had appeared, and the governor could not make his signal, I might have summoned Montignac by a single stroke, and despatched him in the doorway. But now that my own position was easier, I saw that such a manœuvre, first contemplated when only a desperate stroke seemed possible, was full of danger to mademoiselle. I might bungle it, whereupon Montignac would certainly attempt one blow against her, though it were his last. I must, therefore, use the governor to release her from her perilous situation; but first I

must use him for another purpose, which the presence of the keen-witted Montignac might defeat. Hence, the secretary was not yet to be made aware of the turn things had taken.

There were three quills on the table. I took up one of them and dipped it in the horn of ink.

"Shall I tell you of what you are thinking, monsieur," said I, observing on the governor's face a new expression, that of one who listens and makes some mental calculation.

"Amuse yourself as you please, monsieur," he answered.

"You are thinking, first, that as I am in your château, and not alone, I have, doubtless, deprived you of all the soldiers left to guard your château; secondly, that at a certain time, a few hours ago, your troops set out for my residence; that they have probably now learned that I am not there; that they have consequently started to return. You are asking yourself what will happen if I am here when they arrive. Will I kill you before I allow myself to be taken? Probably, you say. Men like me value themselves highly, and sell themselves dearly. You would rather that I leave before they come. Then you can send them on my track. Very well; write, monsieur!" And I handed him the pen.

He looked at me with mingled vindictiveness and wonder, as if it were remarkable that I had uttered

the thoughts that any one in his position must have had. Mechanically he took the pen.

"What shall I write?" he muttered.

"Write thus: To M. de Brissard, governor of Fleurier. Release M. de Varion immediately. Let him accompany the man who bears this and who brings a horse for him."

With many haltings, many side glances at Frojac's arquebus and my sword-point, many glum looks and black frowns, he wrote, while I watched from across the table. Then he threw the document towards me.

"Sign and seal," I said, tossing it back to him.

With intended slovenliness he affixed the signature and seal, then threw the pen to the floor. I took the order, scanned it, and handed him another pen.

"Excellent!" said I. "And now again!"

He made a momentary show of haughty, indignant refusal, but a movement of my sword quelled the brief revolt in him.

"The bearer of this," I dictated, "M. de Varion, is to pass free in the province, and to cross the border where he will."

This time he signed and affixed the seal without additional request. He threw the second pen after the first, and looked up at me with a scowl.

"A bold, brave signature, monsieur! There is one pen left!" and I handed him the third quill.

He took it with a look of wrath, after which he gave a sigh of forced patience, and sat ready to write.

"The bearer of this, Ernanton de Launay —"

"Ernanton de Launay?" he repeated, looking up inquiringly.

"Ernanton de Launay, Sieur de la Tournoire, —" I went on.

He stared at me aghast, as if my presumption really passed all bounds, but a glint of light on my sword caught his eye, he carried his eye along to the point, which was under his nose, and he wrote:

"— is to pass free in the province, and from it, with all his company."

"No, no, no! I will never write that!"

Without an instant's hesitation, I drew back my sword as if to add weight to an intended thrust. He gasped, and then finished the pass, signed it, and attached the seal.

"Be assured," I said, as I took up the last order, "these will be used before you shall have time to countermand them." He gritted his teeth at this. "I thank you heartily, monsieur, and shall ask you to do no more writing. But one favor will I claim, — the loan of a few gold pieces for M. de Varion. Come, monsieur, your purse has ever been well fed!"

With a look of inward groaning, he negligently handed me some pieces, not counting them.

"*Parbleu!*" he said. "You will ask me for my château next."

"All in good time. It is a good jest, monsieur, that while you visit me at Maury by proxy, I return the visit at Clochonne in person and find your château unguarded. To complete the jest, I need only take possession. But I am for elsewhere. Frojac, come here."

While Frojac approached, I held my sword ready for any movement on the part of my unhappy adversary, for I saw him cast a furtive look at the tray on the other table, and I read on his face the birth of some new design.

Rapidly I gave Frojac my commands, with the gold and the two orders first written.

"Take this order immediately, with my horse and your own, to the château of Fleurier. Secure M. de Varion's release, and fly with him at once from the province, leaving by the western border, so that you cannot possibly be forestalled by any troops or counter-orders that this gentleman may send from here. Make your way speedily to Guienne."

"And in Guienne, monsieur?"

"You will doubtless find me at the camp of Henri of Navarre. As soon as you see M. de Varion, assure him of the safety of his daughter. And now to horse!"

"I am already on my way, monsieur!" And the

good fellow ran from the chamber and down the stairs. In a few moments I heard the horses clattering out of the courtyard and over the bridge. Pleased at his zeal and swiftness, I stepped to the window to wave him a godspeed. I thus turned my back towards La Chatre.

Frojac saw me and waved in response, as he dashed down the moonlit way towards the road to Fleurier.

I heard a stealthy noise behind me, and, turning, saw what made me fiercely repent my momentary forgetfulness and my reliance on the governor's lameness. The sight revealed plainly enough what new idea had come into La Chatre's mind, — simply that, if he should give the signal for mademoiselle's death, I would probably not stay to attack him, but would instantly rush into the next chamber in the hope of saving her. He could then fasten the door, and so hold me prisoner in that chamber until the return of his troops. Well for us that he had not thought of this before the arrival of Frojac!

He was already near the table on which was the tray, when I turned and saw him. He raised his stick to strike the tray. I rushed after him.

He brought down his stick. The tray sounded, loud and bell-like. He heard me coming, and raised his stick again. The second clang would be the death-knell of my beloved!

But my sword was in time, my arm served. The blade met the descending stick and knocked it from the governor's grasp. The same rush that took me between La Chatre and the table carried me across the chamber to a spot at one side of the door which Montignac at that moment threw open.

"You struck once, did you not, monsieur?" said Montignac, not seeing me, for he naturally looked towards the centre of the chamber.

He held mademoiselle's wrist in his left hand, his dagger in his right. I was at his right side. I was too near him to use my sword with effect, so I contented myself with stepping quickly behind him and bringing my fist down on his left arm above the elbow. This unexpected blow made him involuntarily release mademoiselle's wrist, and informed him of my whereabouts. The impulse of self-preservation caused him to rush forward and turn. I then stepped in front of mademoiselle and faced him. All this, from my turning from the window, was done in a moment.

"And now, M. de la Chatre," said I, "you may strike the bowl as often as you please."

"M. de la Chatre," said Montignac, in a quick, resolute voice, "give me leave to finish this!"

"As you will, Montignac!" replied the governor, moving towards the window. His movement betrayed his thought. If his troops should return in

the next few minutes, I would be too busy with Montignac to attack himself. There were two hopes for him. One was that, by some miracle, Montignac might kill or wound me. The other was that the troops might return before I should have finished with Montignac. La Chatre had doubtless inferred that I had brought with me none of my men but Frojac; therefore I alone was to be feared.

Montignac, keeping his eyes fixed on me, transferred his dagger to his left hand, and drew his sword with his right. I, with my sword already in my right hand, drew my dagger with my left.

"Monsieur," said I to Montignac, "I see with pleasure that you are not a coward."

"You shall see what you shall see, monsieur!" he answered, in the voice of a man who fears nothing and never loses his wits.

It was, indeed, a wonder that this man of thought could become so admirable a man of action. There was nothing fragile in this pale student. His eyes took on the hardness of steel. Never did more self-reliant and resolute an antagonist meet me. The hate that was manifest in his countenance did not rob him of self-possession. It only strengthened and steadied him. At first I thought him foolhardy to face so boldly an antagonist who wore a breast-plate, but later I found that, beneath his jerkin, he was similarly protected. I suppose that he had

intended to accompany the troops to Maury, had so prepared himself for battle, and had not found opportunity, after the change of intention, to divest himself.

Conscious of mademoiselle's presence behind me, I stood for a moment awaiting the secretary's attack. In that moment did I hear, or but seem to hear, the sound of many horses' footfalls on the distant road? I did not wait to assure myself. Knowing that, if the governor's troops had indeed found Maury abandoned, and had returned, quick work was necessary, I attacked at the same instant as my adversary did. As I would no more than disable an antagonist less protected than myself, I made to touch him lightly in his right side; but my point, tearing away a part of his jerkin, gave the sound and feel of metal, and thus I learned that he too wore body armor. I was pleased at this; for now we were less unequal than I had thought, and I might use full force. He had tried to turn with his dagger this my first thrust, but was not quick enough, whereas my own dagger caught neatly the sword-thrust that he made simultaneously with mine.

"Oh, M. de Launay!" cried mademoiselle, behind me, in a voice of terror, at the first swift clash of our weapons.

"Fear not for me, mademoiselle!" I cried, catching Montignac's blade again with my dagger, and

giving a thrust which he avoided by leaping backward.

"Good, Montignac!" cried La Chatre, looking on from the window. "He cannot reach you! If you cannot kill him, you may keep him engaged till the troops come back!"

"I shall kill him!" was Montignac's reply, while he faced me with set teeth and relentless eyes.

"Listen, monsieur!" cried mademoiselle. "If you die, I shall die with you!" And she ran from behind me to the centre of the chamber, where I could see her.

"And if I live?" I shouted, narrowly stopping a terrible thrust, and stepping back between the table and the bed.

"If we live, I am yours forever! Ernanton, I love you!"

At last she had confessed it with her lips! For the first time, she had called me by my Christian name! My head swam with joy.

"You kill me with happiness, Julie!" I cried, overturning the table towards Montignac to gain a moment's breath.

"I shall kill you with my sword!" Montignac hurled the words through clenched teeth. "For, by God, you shall have no happiness with her!"

His white face had an expression of demoniac hate, yet his thrusts became the more adroit and swift, his

guard the more impenetrable and firm. His body was as sinuous as a wild beast's, his eye as steady. The longer he fought, the more formidable he became as an adversary. He was worth a score of Vicomtes de Berquin.

"Ernanton," cried mademoiselle, "you know all my treachery!"

"I know that you would have saved your father," I answered, leaping backward upon the bed, to avoid the secretary's impetuous rush; "and that I have saved him, and that, God willing, we shall soon meet him in Guienne!"

"If he meets you, it will be in hell!" With this, Montignac jumped upon the bed after me, and there was some close dagger play while I turned to back out between the posts at the foot.

At this moment La Chatre gave a loud, jubilant cry, and mademoiselle, looking out of the window, uttered a scream of consternation.

"The troops at last!" shouted La Chatre "Hold out but another minute, Montignac!"

So then I had heard aright. Alas, I thought, that the river road to Maury should be so much shorter than the forest road; alas, that the governor's troops should have had time to return ere Blaise had reached the junction of the roads!

"My God, the soldiers have us in a trap!" cried mademoiselle, while I caught Montignac's dagger-

point with a bed-curtain, and stepped backward from the bed to the floor.

"And mademoiselle shall be mine!"

As he uttered these words with a fiendish kind of elation, Montignac leaped from the bed after me, releasing his dagger by pulling the curtain from its fastening, while at the same time his sword-point, directed at my neck, rang on my breast-plate.

"You shall not live to see the end of this, monsieur!" I replied, infuriated at his premature glee.

And, having given ground a little, I made so quick an onslaught that, in saving himself, he fell back against a chair, which overturned and took him to the floor with it.

"Help, monsieur!" he cried to La Chatre, raising his dagger just in time to ward off my sword.

The governor now perceived the sword that stood by the fireplace, took it up, and thrust at me. Mademoiselle, who, in her distress at the sight of the troops, had run to the *prie-dieu* and fallen on her knees, saw La Chatre's movement, and, rushing forward, caught the sword with both hands as he thrust. I expected to see her fingers torn by the blade, but it happened that the sword was still in its sheath, a fact which in our excitement none of us had observed; so that when La Chatre tried to pull

the weapon from her grasp he merely drew it from the sheath, which remained in her hands. By this time I was ready for the governor.

"Come on!" I cried. "It is a better match, two against me!"

And I sent La Chatre's sword flying from his hand, just in time to guard against a dagger stroke from Montignac, who had now risen. Julie snatched up the sword and held the governor at bay with it.

For some moments the distant clatter of galloping horses had been rapidly increasing.

"Quick!" shouted La Chatre through the window to the approaching troops. "To the rescue!"

And he stood wildly beckoning them on, but keeping his head turned towards Montignac and me, who both fought with the greatest fury. For I saw that I had found at last an antagonist requiring all my strength and skill, one with whom the outcome was not at all certain.

The tumult of hoofs grew louder and nearer.

"Ernanton, fly while we can! The soldiers are coming!"

Mademoiselle threw La Chatre's sword to a far corner, ran to the door leading from the stairway landing, closed it, and pushed home the bolt.

"They are at the gate! They are entering!" cried the governor, joyously. "Another minute, Montignac!"

There was the rushing clank of hoofs on the drawbridge, then from the courtyard rose a confused turbulence of horses, men, and arms.

Again my weapons clashed with Montignac's. Julie looked swiftly around. Her eye alighted on the dagger that lay on one of the chairs. She drew it from its sheath.

"If we die, it is together!" she cried, holding it aloft.

There came a deadened, thumping sound, growing swiftly to great volume. It was that of men rushing up the stairs.

"To the rescue!" cried La Chatre. "But one more parry, Montignac!"

There was now a thunder of tramping in the hall outside the door.

"Ay, one more — the last!" It was I who spoke, and the speech was truth. I leaped upon my enemy, between his dagger and his sword, and buried my dagger in his neck. When I drew it out, he whirled around, clutched wildly at the air, caught the curtain at the window, and fell, with the quick, sharp cry:

"God have mercy on me!"

"Amen to that!" said I, wiping the blood from my dagger.

A terrible pounding shook the door, and from without came cries of "Open." Mademoiselle ran

"'ARE WE IN TIME, MY CAPTAIN?'"

to my side, her dagger ready for her breast. I put my left arm around her.

"And now, God have mercy on *you!*" shouted La Chatre, triumphantly; for the door flew from its place, and armed men surged into the chamber, crowding the open doorway.

"Are we in time, my captain?" roared their leader, looking from the governor to me.

And La Chatre tottered back to the fireplace, dumbfounded, for the leader was Blaise and the men were my own.

Julie gave a glad little cry, and, dropping her dagger, sank to her knees exhausted.

"Good-night, monsieur!" I said to La Chatre. "We thank you for your hospitality!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RIDE TOWARDS GUIENNE.

I ORDERED the men to return to the courtyard, and, supporting Julie, I followed them from the chamber, leaving M. de la Chatre alone with his chagrin and the dead body of his secretary.

In the hall outside the governor's chamber, we found Jeannotte and Hugo, for Blaise had brought them with him, believing that we would not return to Maury. The gypsies had accompanied him as far as Godeau's inn, where we had first met them. He had even brought as much baggage and provisions as could be hastily packed on the horses behind the men. The only human beings left by him at Maury were the three rascals who had so blunderingly served De Berquin, but he had considerately unlocked the door of their cell before his departure.

I begged mademoiselle to rest a while in one of the chambers contiguous to the hall, and, when she and Jeannotte had left us, I told Blaise as much of the truth as it needed to show mademoiselle as she was. I then explained why he had found the draw-

bridge down, the gate open, the château undefended. He grinned at the trick that fate had played on our enemies, but looked rather downcast at the lost opportunity of meeting them at Maury.

"But," said he, looking cheerful again, "they will come back to the château and find us here, and we may yet have some lively work with them."

"Perchance," I said, "for I fear that mademoiselle cannot endure another ride to-night. If she could, I would start immediately for Guienne. Our work in Berry is finished."

"Then you shall start immediately," said a gentle but resolute voice behind me. Mademoiselle, after a few minutes' repose, had risen and come to demand that no consideration for her comfort should further imperil our safety.

"But —" I started to object.

"Better another ride," she said, with a smile, "than another risking of your life. I swear that I will not rest till you are out of danger. It is not I who most need rest."

She looked, indeed, fresh and vigorous, as one will, despite bodily fatigue, when one has cast off a heavy burden and found promise of new happiness. When a whole lifetime of joy was to be won, it was no time to tarry for the sake of weary limbs.

So it was decided that we should start at once southward, not resting until we should be half-way

across the mountains. As for my belated foragers, we should have to let them take their chances of rejoining us; and some weeks later they did indeed arrive at the camp in Guienne with rich spoil, having found Maury given over to the owls and bats as of yore.

The men cheered for joy at the announcement that we were at last to rejoin our Henri's flying camp. In the guard-house we found Pierre and the other guardsman, both securely bound by Frojac. We released Pierre and sent him to his mistress. I put Blaise at the head of my company, and we set forth, half of the troop going first, then mademoiselle and I, then Jeannotte and the two boys, and lastly the other half of my force. Looking back, I saw the lighted window of the governor's chamber, that window whence I had looked out at Frojac and whence La Chatre had mistakenly taken my men for his own. Doubtless he still sat in his chamber, dazed and incapable of action, for after leaving him alone there I neither saw nor heard him. Nor did we see any more troops or any servants about the château. Some hasty scampering in distant apartments, after the entrance of my men, was the only indication of inhabitants that we had received. If there were other troops in the château than the six we had disposed of, they followed the example of the servants and lay close. As for the soldiers at the town

guard-house, they must have heard my men ride to the château, but they had wisely refrained from appearing before a force greater than their own. I shall never cease to marvel that the very night that took me and my men to Clochonne by one road took La Chatre's guards and the town garrison to Maury by another.

When I sent Blaise to the head of the troops, I told him to set a good pace, for the governor's men had indeed had time sufficient to have gone to Maury, discovered their mistake, and come back, so much shorter is the river road than the forest way. There was a likelihood, therefore, of their reaching the point of junction, on their return, at any minute, and I wished to be past that point and well up the mountain-side before they should do so.

Julie rode very close to me, and as soon as we were out of the gate she began in a low tone to speak of a thing that required no more explanation to me; yet I let her speak on, for the relief of her heart. So, in a few minutes, as we rode with the soldiers in the night, she eased her mind forever of the matter.

"When I received word in Bourges," she said, "that my father was in prison, I thought that I would die of grief and horror. They would not let me see him, told me that his crime of harboring a Huguenot was a grave one, that he had violated the King's

edict, and might be charged even with treason. The thought of how he must suffer in a dungeon was more than I could endure. Only M. de la Chatre, they told me, could order his release. La Chatre had left Fleurier to go northward. I started after him, not waiting even to refresh my horses. When we reached the inn at the end of the town, I had become sufficiently calm to listen to Hugo's advice that it would be best to bait the horses before going further. I began to perceive, too, that myself and Jeannotte needed some nourishment in order to be able to go on a journey. Thus it happened that I stopped at the inn where La Chatre himself was. He had not gone immediately north from Fleurier, but had been visiting an estate in the vicinity, and it was on regaining the main road that he had tarried at the inn, without reëntering the town. I had never seen him, but the girl at the inn told me who he was.

"When I fell on my knees, and told him how incapable my father was of harm or disloyalty, he at first showed annoyance, and said that my pleading would be useless. My father must be treated as an example, he said. To succor traitors was treason, to shield heretics was heresy, and there was no doubt that the judges would condemn him to death, to furnish others a lesson. He was then going to leave me, but his secretary came forward

and said that I had come at an opportune moment, an instrument sent by Heaven. Was I not, he asked the governor, some one who had much to gain or much to lose? Then La Chatre became joyful, and said that there was a way — one only — by which I might free my father. Eagerly I begged to know that way, but with horror I refused it when I learned that it was to — to hunt down a certain Huguenot captain, to make him trust me, and to betray him. For a time I would not hear his persuasions. Then he swore that, if I did not undertake this detestable mission, my father should surely die; and he told me that you were a deserter, a traitor, an enemy to the church and to the King. I had heard your name but once or twice, and I remembered it only as one who had worked with daring and secrecy in the interests of the Huguenots. He described my father tortured and killed, his body hanging at the gates of Fleurier, blown by the wind, and attacked by the birds. Oh, it was terrible! All this could be avoided, my father's liberty regained, by my merely serving the King and the church. He gave his word that, if I betrayed you, my father should be released without even a trial. You can understand, can you not? You were then a stranger to me, and my father the most gentle and kindly of men, the most tender and devoted of fathers."

"I understood already when I stood behind the curtain, sweetheart," said I.

"When you came," she went on, "and asked whither I was bound, I made my first attempt at lying. I wonder that you did not perceive my embarrassment and shame when I said that the governor had threatened to imprison me if I did not leave the province. It was the best pretext I could give for leaving Fleurier while my father remained there in prison, though they would not let me see him. It occurred to me that you must think me a heartless daughter to go so far from him, even if it were, indeed, to save my life."

"I thought only that you were an unhappy child, of whose inexperience and fears the governor had availed himself; and that, after all, was the truth. From the first moment when I knew that you were the daughter of M. de Varion, I was resolved to attempt his rescue; but I kept my intention from you, lest I might fail."

"Oh, to think that all the while I was planning your betrayal, you were intending to save my father! Oh, the deception of which I was guilty! What constant torture, what continual shame I felt! Often I thought I had betrayed myself. Did you not observe my agitation when you first mentioned the name of La Tournoire, and said that you would take me to him. I wonder that you did not hear my

heart say, 'That is the man I am to betray!' And how bitter, yet sweet, it was to hear you commiserate my dejection, which was due in part to the shame of the treacherous task I had undertaken. It seemed to me that you ought to guess its cause, yet you attributed it all to other sources. What a weight was on me while we rode towards Clochonne, the knowledge that I was to betray the man whom I then thought your friend, — the friend of the gentleman who protected me and was so solicitous for my happiness! How glad I was when you told me the man was no great friend of yours, that you would sacrifice him for the sake of the woman you loved! After all, I thought you might not loathe me when you should learn that I had betrayed him! Yet, to perform my task in your presence, to make him love me — for I was to do that, if needs be and it could be done — while you were with me, seemed impossible. This was the barrier between us, the fact that I had engaged to betray your friend, and you can understand now why I begged that you would leave me. How could I play the Delilah in your sight? It had been hard enough to question you about La Tournoire's hiding-place. And when I learned that you were La Tournoire himself, whom I had already half betrayed in sending Pierre to La Chatre with an account of your hiding-place; that you whom I already loved — why should

I not confess it? — were the man whom I was to pretend to love; that you who already loved me were the man whom I was to betray by making him love me, — oh, what a moment that was, a moment when all hope died and despair overwhelmed me! Had I known from the first that you were he, I might have guarded against loving you — "

"And well it is," said I, interrupting, "that for a jest and a surprise I had kept that knowledge from you! Else you might indeed have — "

"Oh, do not think of it!" And she shuddered. "But you are right. Love alone has saved us. But at first even the knowledge that you were La Tournoire, and that none the less I loved you, did not make me turn back. If my duty to my father had before required that I should sacrifice you, did my duty not still require it? Did it make any change in my duty that I loved you? What right had I, when devoted to a task like mine, to love any one? If I had violated my duty by loving you, ought I not to disregard my love, stifle it, act as if it did not exist? I had to forget that I was a woman who loved, remember only that I was a daughter. My filial duty was no less, my proper choice between my father and another was not altered by my having fallen in love. I must carry my horrible task to the end. What a night of struggle was that at the inn, after I had learned that the appointed victim was you!

And now it was necessary that you should not leave me; therefore I spoke no more of the barrier between us. I fortified myself to hide my feelings and maintain my pretence. Surely you noticed the change in me, the forced composure and cheerfulness. How I tried to harden myself!

"And after that the words of love you so often spoke to me, what bliss and what anguish they caused me! I was to have made you love me, but you loved me already. I ought to have rejoiced at this, for the success that it promised my purpose. Yet, it was on that account that I shuddered at it; and if it did give me moments of joy it was because it was pleasant to have your love. My heart rose at the thought that I was loved by you, and fell at the thought that your love was to cause your death. Often, for your own sake, I wished that I might fail, that you would not love me; yet for my father's sake I had to wish that I should succeed, had to be glad that you loved me. To make you fall the more easily into the hands of your enemies, I had to show love for you. How easy it was to show what I felt; yet what anguish I underwent in showing it, when by doing so I led you to death! The more I appeared to love you, the more truly I disclosed my heart, yet the greater I felt was my treason! I do not think any woman's heart was ever so torn by opposing motives!"

"My beloved, all that is past forever!"

"In my dreams at Maury, we would be strolling together among roses, under cloudless skies, nothing to darken my joy. Then I would see you wounded, the soldiers of the governor gathered around you and laughing at my horror and grief. I would awake and vow not to betray you, and then I would see my father's face, pale and haggard, and my dead mother's, wet with tears for his misery and supplicating me to save him!"

"My poor Julie!"

"And to-night, — yes, it was only to-night, it seems so long ago, — when you held my hand on the dial, and plighted fidelity, what happiness I should have had then, but for the knowledge of my horrible task, of the death that awaited you, of the treason I was so soon to commit! For I and Jeannotte had already arranged it, Hugo was soon to be sent to La Chatre. And then came De Berquin. For telling only the truth of me, you killed him as a traducer. So much faith you had in me, who deserved so little! I could endure it no longer! Never would I look on your face again with that weight of shame on me. God must send other means of saving my father. They demanded too much of me. I would, as far as I could, make myself worthy of your faith, though I never saw you again. Yet I could not betray La Chatre.

He had entrusted me with his design, and, detestable as it was, I could not play him false in it. But I could at least resign the mission. And I went, to undo the compact and claim back my honor! I little guessed that he would make use, without my knowledge, of the information I had sent him of your hiding-place. It seemed that, even though La Chatre did know your hiding-place, God would not let you be taken through me if I refused to be your betrayer."

"And so it has turned out," I said, blithely, "and now I no longer regret having kept from you my intention of attempting your father's release. For had I told you of it, and events taken another course, that attempt might have failed, and it would perhaps have cost many lives, whereas the order that I got from La Chatre this night is both sure and inexpensive. But for matters having gone as they have, I should not have been enabled to get that order. Ha! What is this!"

For Blaise had suddenly called a halt, and was riding back to me as if for orders.

"Look, monsieur!" and he pointed to where the river road appeared from behind a little spur at the base of the mountains. A body of horsemen was coming into view. At one glance I recognized the foremost riders as belonging to the troop I had seen four hours before.

"The devil!" said I. "La Chatre's soldiers coming back from Maury!"

We had ridden down the descent leading from the château along the town wall, and had left the town some distance behind, so that the mountains now loomed large before us. But we had not yet passed the place where the roads converged.

"If we can only get into the mountain road before they reach this one, we shall not meet them," I went on. "Forward, men!"

"But," said Blaise, astonished and frowning, but riding on beside me, "they will reach this road before we pass the junction. Do you wish them to take us in the flank? See, they have seen us and are pressing forward!"

"If we reach our road in time, we shall lead them a chase. Go to the head and set the pace at a gallop!"

"And have them overtake us and fall on our rear?"

"You mutinous rascal, don't you see that they are three times our number? We stand better chance in flight than in fight! But, no, you are right! They are too near the junction. We must face them. I shall go to the head. Julie, my betrothed, I must leave you for a time. Roquelin and Sabray shall fall behind with you, Jeannotte, and the two boys."

"I shall not leave your side!" she said, resolutely.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" cried Jeannotte, in a great fright.

"You may fall back, if you like," said Julie to her. "I shall not."

All this time we were going forward and the governor's troops were rapidly nearing the junction. We could now plainly hear the noise they made, which, because of that made by ourselves, we had not heard sooner. They were looking at us with curiosity, and were evidently determined to intercept us.

"Julie, consider! There may be great danger."

"If you are endangered, why should not I be? This is not the night, Ernanton, on which you should ask me to leave you."

"Then I shall at least remain here," said I. "Go to the head, Blaise. But if there is a challenge, I shall answer it. Perhaps they will not know us and we can make them think we are friends."

He rode forward with sparkling eyes, although not before casting one glance of solicitude at Jeannotte, who did not leave her mistress.

The men eagerly looked to their arms as they rode, and they exchanged conjectures in low, quick tones, casting many a curious look at the approaching force. Julie and I kept silence, I wondering what would be the outcome of this encounter.

Suddenly, when the head of their long, somewhat straggling line had just reached the junction, and Blaise was but a short distance from it, came from their leader — La Chatre's equerry, I think — the order to halt, and then the clear, sharp cry :

"Who goes there?"

Before I could answer, a familiar voice near their leader cried out :

"It is his company, — La Tournoire's, — I swear it! I know the big fellow at the head."

The voice was that of the foppish, cowardly rascal of De Berquin's band. I now saw that the three fellows left by Blaise at Maury were held as prisoners by the governor's troops. Poor Jacques, doubtless, thought to get his freedom or some reward for crying out our identity.

"I shall wring your neck yet, lap-dog!" roared Blaise.

All chance of passing under false colors was now gone. A battle with thrice our force seemed imminent. What would befall Julie if they should be too much for us? The thought made me sick with horror. At that instant I remembered something.

"Halt!" I cried to the men. "I shall return in a moment, sweetheart. Monsieur, the captain," and I rode forward towards the leader of the governor's troops, "your informant speaks truly. Permit me to introduce myself. I am the Sieur de

la Tournoire, the person named in that order." With which I politely handed him the pass that I had forced from La Chatre, which I had for a time forgotten.

It was about three hours after midnight, and the moon was not yet very low. The captain, taken by surprise in several respects, mechanically grasped the document and read it.

"It is a — a pass," he said, presently, staring at it and at me in a bewildered manner.

"As you see, for myself and all my company," said I; "signed by M. de la Chatre."

"Yes, it is his signature."

"His seal, also, you will observe."

"I do. Yet, it is strange. Certain orders that I have received, — in fact, orders to which I have just been attending, — make this very surprising. I cannot understand — "

"It is very simple. While you were attending to your orders, I was making a treaty with M. de la Chatre. In accordance with it, he wrote the pass. He will, doubtless, relate the purport of our interview as soon as you return to the château. I know that he is impatient for your coming. Therefore, since you have seen the pass, I shall not detain you longer."

"But — I do not know — it is, indeed, the writing of M. de la Chatre — it seems quite right, yet —

monsieur, since all is right, you will not object to returning with me to the château that M. de la Chatre may verify his pass?"

"Since all is right, there is no use in my doing so; and it would be most annoying to M. de la Chatre to be asked to verify his own writing, especially as the very object of this pass was to avoid my being delayed on my march this night."

The captain, a young and handsome gentleman, with a frank look and a courteous manner, hesitated.

"Monsieur will understand," I went on, "that every minute we stand here opposes the purpose for which that pass was given."

"I begin to see," he said, with a look of pleasurable discovery. "You have changed sides, monsieur? You have repented of your errors and have put your great skill and courage at the service of M. de la Chatre?"

"It is for M. de la Chatre to say what passed between us this evening," said I, with a discreet air. "Then *au revoir*, captain! I trust we shall meet again."

And I took back the pass, and ordered my men forward, as if the young captain had already given me permission to go on. Then I saluted him, and returned to Julie. The captain gazed at us in a kind of abstraction as we passed. His men were as dumbfounded as my own. His foremost horse-

men had heard the short conversation concerning the pass, and were, doubtless, as much at a loss as their leader was. When we were well in the mountain road, I heard him give the order to march, and, looking back, I saw them turn wearily up the road to the château. We continued to put distance between ourselves and Clochonne.

On the northern slope of the mountains, we made but one stop. That was at Godeau's, where we had a short rest and some wine. I gave the good Marianne a last gold piece, received her Godspeed, and took up our march, this time ignoring the forest path to Maury, following the old road southward instead. It would be time to set up our camp when we should be out of the province of Berry.

It was while we were yet ascending the northern slope of the mountains, and the moon still shone now and then from the west through the trees, that we talked, Julie and I, of the time that lay before us. It mattered not to me under which form our marriage should be. One creed was to me only a little the better of the two, in that it involved less of subjection, but if the outward profession of the other would facilitate our union, I would make that profession, reserving always my sword and my true sympathies for the side that my fathers had taken. But when I proposed this, Julie said that I ought not even to assume the appearance of having

changed my colors, and that it was for her, the woman, to adopt mine, therefore she would abjure and we should be married as Protestants. She could answer for the consent of her father, who could not refuse his preserver and hers. It pleased me that she made no mention of her lack of dowry, for their little estate would certainly be confiscated after her father's flight. Judging my love by her own, she knew that I valued herself alone above all the fortunes in the world. We would, then, be united as soon as her father, guided by Frojac, should join us in Guienne. She and her father should then go to Nerac, there to await my return from the war that was now imminent; for I was to continue advancing my fortunes by following those of our Henri on the field. Some day our leader would overcome his enemies and mount the throne that the fated Henri III. — ailing survivor of three short-lived brothers — would soon leave vacant. Then our King would restore us our estates, I should rebuild La Tournoire, and there we should pass our days in the peace that our Henri's accession would bring his kingdom. Blaise should marry Jeannotte and be our steward.

So we gave word to our intentions and hopes, those that I have here written and many others. Some have been realized, and some have not, but all that I have here written have been.

Once, years after that night, having gone up to Paris to give our two eldest children a glimpse of the court, we were walking through the gallery built by our great Henri IV., to connect the Louvre with the Tuileries, when my son asked me who was the painted fat old lady that was staring so hard at him as if she had seen him before. In turn I asked the Abbé Brantome, who happened to be passing.

"It is the Marquise de Pirillaume," he said. "She was a gallant lady in the reign of Henri III. She was Mlle. d'Arency and very beautiful."

I turned my eyes from her to Julie at my side, — to Julie, as fair and slender and beautiful still as on that night when we rode together with my soldiers towards Guienne, in the moonlight.

THE END.

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